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Management By Crisis: Land Trust Conservation Engagement And Methods In Vermont

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MANAGEMENT BY CRISIS: LAND TRUST CONSERVATION ENGAGEMENT
AND METHODS IN VERMONT

A Thesis Presented

by

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ABSTRACT

Planning a future for our landscapes can be a daunting challenge for communities in Vermont. Conservation initiatives affect the quality of life for all community members and can be difficult to change in the event of poor planning. Through examining stakeholder relationships with land trusts I have explored the complexities of planning processes used by land trusts in Vermont for conservation initiatives.

The study involved one statewide land trust, the Vermont Land Trust, and two community land trusts, the Stowe Land Trust and the Duxbury Land Trust. I used qualitative methods including document review, observation and interviews to gather data on land trust planning. My study shows how stakeholder relationships shape conservation initiatives, what strategies land trusts use to aid stakeholder involvement, and how stakeholder input affects conservation easements.

Interviews with internal and external stakeholders for each land trust indicate a negative feedback loop within the organizational structure of these land trusts I call “management by crisis.” My case study examples suggest stakeholders are not involved in conservation until there is a threat to the landscape. This makes strategic planning difficult and limits a land trust’s ability to link important parcels together for environmental and social benefit.

I suggest that management by crisis can be replaced with positive feedback using Community Based Participatory Research. This approach relies on communities initiating projects and being an integral part of the planning process from the beginning of a conservation initiative. Involving stakeholders allows land trusts to better evaluate community needs for the landscape.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
VERMONT, STOWE AND DUXBURY LAND TRUSTS: AN INTRODUCTION	4
CHAPTER 2: THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS OF CONSERVATION	8
INTERNAL SYSTEMS.....	8
<i>Organizational Development.....</i>	8
<i>Strategic Planning.....</i>	12
<i>Nonprofit Governance</i>	15
<i>Collaborative Governance, Managerialism and Adversarialism</i>	19
<i>Feedback Loops and Management by Crisis</i>	21
EXTERNAL SYSTEMS	25
<i>Social Capital</i>	25
<i>Stewardship and Participation</i>	28
<i>Organizational Collaboration</i>	37
<i>Crisis Management outside Vermont.....</i>	40
CHAPTER 3: METHODS	45
RESEARCH AND DESIGN.....	45
DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE	49
DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS	56
BIAS AND RESEARCH LIMITATIONS	57
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS.....	59
SITE DESCRIPTIONS	59
<i>Emergent Themes</i>	68
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	108
RAMIFICATIONS FOR THE VERMONT LANDSCAPE	108
FROM REACTIVE TO PROACTIVE	120
CONCLUSION	131
SOURCES	133
APPENDICIES	137
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDELINE FOR INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS.....	137
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDELINE FOR EXTERNAL STAKEHODLERS.....	138
APPENDIX C: VERMONT LAND TRUST MAP OF CONSERVED LAND	140
APPENDIX D: TOTAL AMOUNT OF CONSERVED LAND IN VERMONT IN 2010	142
APPENDIX E: STOWE CONSERVATION MAP.....	142
APPENDIX F: TOWN MEETING ATTENDANCE IN NEWBURY VT FROM 1970-1998	143

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1:	
ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM FLOW CHART	10
FIGURE 2:	
THE ABCs OF STRATEGIC PLANNING.....	13
FIGURE 3:	
INPUT-OUTPUT FLOW	16
FIGURE 4:	
LAND TRUST PROJECT MATRIX: STATE LAND TRUST CASE STUDY	48
FIGURE 5:	
LAND TRUST PROJECT MATRIX: COMMUNITY LAND TRUST CASE STUDY	49
FIGURE 6:	
SYSTEMS MAP TECHNIQUE FOR QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS.....	54
FIGURE 7:	
SYSTEMS MAPPING FOR LAND TRUST CONSERVATION IN DUXBURY, STOWE AND THE VERMONT LAND TRUSTS.....	55
FIGURE 8:	
INPUT CODE CATEGORIZATION	62
FIGURE 9:	
NEGATIVE CONSERVATION FEEDBACK LOOP.....	67
FIGURE 10:	
BASE CONCEPTUAL MAP	125
FIGURE 11:	
POSITIVE FEEDBACK LOOP #1.....	126
FIGURE 12:	
POSITIVE FEEDBACK LOOP #2.....	127

Chapter 1: Introduction

Planning a future for the landscapes we live in can be a challenge. Those communities lucky enough to have the opportunity to obtain and manage public land are faced with a range of tasks and decisions that will likely affect the quality of life for everyone involved. The primary task in the planning process is to create a vision for the landscape that provides the greatest benefit for the largest number of people. For this project I set out to find what factors might play a role in how stakeholders choose a management path for a piece of property. I began by asking the question of whether or not collaborative stakeholder involvement is a product of a particular conservation approach. To try and answer this question, I focused on the role of land trusts, a leading force in the conservation movement in Vermont, and how their conservation objectives and processes change based on stakeholder engagement.

In Vermont, public land is a shared resource that, at least in principle, provides both residents and tourists a way to experience the beauty that the state has to offer. Whether people enjoy land for recreation, education, or simply enjoy knowing that a piece of property is conserved, they understand that through the management process they are creating a vision for Vermont that will provide future generations not only with a view, but also with an opportunity to form and cultivate a personal relationship with the landscape. Conservation is the promise created by a community that certain aesthetics and values shared by a community will be stewarded into the future for generations to come.

There are a number of ways that property in Vermont can be conserved for community use. Different approaches to land conservation achieve different goals for each individual invested in the outcome of the conservation process. These invested individuals I will refer to as stakeholders. For the purpose of my study, stakeholders are people who live within or interact with the Duxbury, Stowe, and Vermont Land Trust communities. This includes both people who work for land trusts (internal stakeholders) and members of the greater community (external stakeholders). I do not refer to businesses or other organizational entities as stakeholders but I do refer to the people who work for organizations, in particular, land trusts, as stakeholders.

Nationally there were 1,723 land trusts as for the 2010 census and these land trusts had conserved a total of 47 million acres. California had the most land trusts with 197, followed by Massachusetts (159), Connecticut (137), Pennsylvania (103) and New York (97), and as of 2010, there were 35 land trusts in Vermont that had conserved a total of 613,971 acres. This total ranks Vermont 8th nationally and 3rd in the Northeast for its amount of Conserved land. With this large number of land trusts inevitably there will be some variation in procedures for the conservation of land, and in land trust interactions with community stakeholders. State land trusts and community land trusts have differing strategies for conservation and therefore must apply varying methods for easement allowances and management (<http://www.landtrustalliance.org/>).

The *Vermont Land Trust* (VLT) falls under the description set by the Land Trust Alliance as a **General Conservation Land Trust**, and is described as “a

nonprofit organization that, as all or part of its mission, actively works to conserve land by undertaking or assisting in land or conservation easement acquisition, or by its stewardship of such land or easements” (<http://www.landtrustalliance.org/>). The *Vermont Land Trust*, being a Conservation Land Trust, has a broadly stated mission: “to conserve land for the future of Vermont” (<http://www.vlt.org/>). This relatively unrestrictive statement allows the VLT to help conserve a broad range of properties of different sizes and uses. The VLT primarily focuses on the conservation of farmland and forestland that is oftentimes sold to a private entity entrusted with stewardship responsibilities. In certain circumstances, the VLT will conserve community land such as “town forests, swimming holes, sledding hills, trails, ball fields... places that help make a community, that give residents a sense of place” (<http://www.vlt.org/>). As a statewide organization, the scope of conservation for the VLT is large.

In comparison, **Community Land Trusts** in the state of Vermont are interested in conserving land within their respective community boundaries in addition to working to maintain and foster those social services that are characteristic of smaller regions. Nine of the 35 land trusts in Vermont relate directly to a single township with a mission statement that specifically pertains to the wellbeing of its target community. The Land Trust Alliance describes a Community land trust as:

“A community land trust is a private, non-profit corporation, created to acquire and hold land for the benefit of a community, and provide secure affordable access to land and housing for community residents.

CLTs offer a balanced approach to ownership: the nonprofit trust owns the land and leases it for a nominal fee to individuals who own the buildings on the land. As the home is truly their own, it provides the homeowners with the same permanence and security as a conventional buyer, and they can use the land in the same way as any other homeowner. In particular, Community land trusts attempt to meet the needs of residents least served by the prevailing land market.

Community land trusts help communities to:

- Gain control over local land use and reduce absentee ownership
- Provide affordable housing for lower income residents in the community
- Promote resident ownership and control of housing
- Keep housing affordable for future residents
- Capture the value of public investment for long-term community benefit
- Build a strong base for community action.”

(<http://www.landtrustalliance.org/>)

One such example is described in the Stowe Land Trust’s mission statement: “The Stowe Land Trust is dedicated to the conservation of scenic, recreational, and productive farm and forest lands for the benefit of the greater Stowe community” (<http://www.stowelandtrust.org/>). In the case of community land trusts, the local benefits of conservation come before the regional benefits of conservation. My hypothesis at the beginning of this study was that small land trusts are better able to take the pulse of the community they serve and know best how to plan for and manage a landscape that embodies the needs and desires of their local constituents. In reality this is not always the case, and as my study showed, the size of a land trust is not the best measure of its engagement with a community and its stakeholders.

Vermont, Stowe and Duxbury land trusts: an introduction

The Vermont Land Trust is a leader in conservation in Vermont due to its size. With seven official branches around the state and over 45 staff members, the reach of this organization is daunting in comparison with many of the community land trusts throughout the state. These regional branches create a network that help the central office in Montpelier understand specific community needs through the outreach of regional officers. The VLT has a handful of paid staff who are guided by a Board of Directors comprised of 15 individuals from around the state. Most regional officers

are paid less than the amount that needs to be reported on a 990 tax form, however there are two employees who earned over \$100,000 in 2012 and four staff members who earned between \$50,000 and \$100,000 in 2012. The Vermont Land Trust's total revenue stated on the 2012 990 was \$11,711,359.

By comparison, the Stowe Land Trust has three paid employees and their executive director is the only paid staff that earns over \$50,000. There are 22 Board of Directors members total for the SLT and three hold director positions. This is a large number for a land trust whose annual income in 2012 was \$1,608,938. The number of board members speaks to the importance of a local community member presence in the governance of community nonprofits such as the SLT. As a single community land trust, individuals serve as links to a community, as there is no need for regional offices as with the VLT.

The Duxbury Land Trust, smallest of the three in this study, has no paid employees and has not filed a 990 form since 2001. The income in 2001 was \$537. It is clear, simply due to the fact that a tax form has not been filed in over a decade, that the staffing structure for the Duxbury Land Trust is not as thorough as the SLT or VLT. Eight Board of Directors serve for the Duxbury Land Trust, and each must play more of a leadership role in order for the nonprofit to step up to the task of conserving land for the community of Duxbury as there are no paid employees to rely on for the completion of projects. These differing organizational structures affect the functionality of a conservation project and also have an effect on the style of outreach and conservation initiation strategies a land trust employs (<http://www.guidestar.org/>).

When considering the issue of stakeholder involvement in the conservation process, communities, state-wide and local, are all different and the management process for a piece of land must be tailored to varying local conditions. There are many parts to a conservation process, and for the purposes of this study, I have defined this process as the time including and between the conceptualization of a conservation project and the implementation of a management plan for a particular parcel. The communities referred to in this study are groups of stakeholders affected by particular conservation initiatives.

Whether the goals are defined by an NGO, a state agency, a community, or an individual stakeholder, a plan needs to be created to steward the management of the land into the future. In order to create an integrative and comprehensive land management plan, a strategy must be in place so that conservation initiatives are both collaborative and inclusive. It must take into account as many different views and needs as possible. The current piecemeal style of conservation that results from variables such as a deficit in resources, participation, and knowledge, creates a context where opportunistic land deals are commonplace. This lack of holistic visioning makes it hard for conservation to achieve its greatest potential. The mark of a profitable business is its ability to look to the future and understand what the demand for a certain product might be and then provide the supply that will meet people's needs. This same rule can be applied to nonprofit organizations. For this reason I hypothesize that Vermont communities must look ahead and make informed decisions about what might be needed and wanted from a landscape in the future, and without a plan to outline the steps that should be taken to achieve

whatever goal has been outlined by stakeholders, there is no way of knowing when you reach your goal, how far you still have to go, or whether you have lost sight of your goal completely. A plan is a way to make sure you are achieving what you set out to do and is the vehicle for reassessing your goals if they are no longer feasible or desirable. In this paper I will highlight inconsistencies in the conservation process that make it difficult for land trusts and the communities they serve to be able to create a strategic and sustainable plan for the Vermont landscape. My objective at the start of this study was to understand what created an atmosphere conducive to effective planning for the three land trusts I chose to examine. Identifying these characteristics led me to ask bigger questions about whether or not land trusts in Vermont have defined strategic plans for conservation and what variables influence this planning process. I also took a broader look at how land trust decisions are both indicative of and shape the planning process for the greater Vermont landscape.

Chapter 2: The internal and external relationships of conservation

Land Trust conservation is complex and its effectiveness relies on the proper function of internal organizational systems such as organizational development of land trusts, strategic planning and nonprofit governance, in addition to the external systems of social capital, stewardship, and participation. This literature review addresses these two categories of internal and external systems. The review will start with a look into the internal systems of land trusts in Vermont to create a theoretical foundation before examining the external systems that are derived from the existence of certain organizational and governance structures.

Internal Systems

Internal systems define how a land trust builds its organizational structure to best serve its constituency and realize its mission. To better understand the impact of these systems, there will be a bottom up examination starting with how land trusts pursue objectives with *Organizational Development*, to how they realize those objectives with *Strategic Planning*, and finally how they fit into the larger nonprofit world with *Nonprofit Governance*.

Organizational Development

As mentioned earlier, nonprofit organizations, much like for-profit organizations, need to be efficient and on task internally. This process starts with

Organizational Development. A look into Organizational Development (OD) shows that there can be many ways to define this qualitative process of management. The definition that best illustrates the interconnected nature of the field explains that “organizational development is an organizational process for understanding and improving any and all substantive processes an organization may develop for performing any task and pursuing any objectives” (Bell and French, 1999). As this description illustrates, this process can occur anywhere from the minutia of an organization’s structure to the vision and goals set out by an organization in its strategic plan.

With flexible attitudes, beliefs, and outcomes, an organization should be able to embrace change and learn from experience so as to better serve its clientele, stakeholder groups, and any “changing environmental demands” that may present (Bell and French, 1999). These environmental demands can include anything from changing client desires to stakeholder conflicts. If an organization is not continually reflecting on and examining both its internal and external systems, it will never see when its mission, vision and goals are no longer effective in achieving a desired outcome, or even if the outcome they desire is still relevant to the public it serves.

In OD, the tools for building these strong organizational systems that can evolve with the changing demands of the public are listed by Bell and French as: models and theories of planned change, systems theory, participation and empowerment, team and teamwork, parallel learning structures, a normative-reductive strategy for changes, applied behavioral science, and finally, action research (Bell and French, 1999).

At the heart of each concept is the idea that to build a strong, working organization, the internal actors must not only work together to discuss and continually assess the effectiveness of procedures and organizational initiatives, but they must also seek out new ideas and views from the outside so as to stay relevant and avoid an assumption of need and desire from stakeholder/clientele groups.

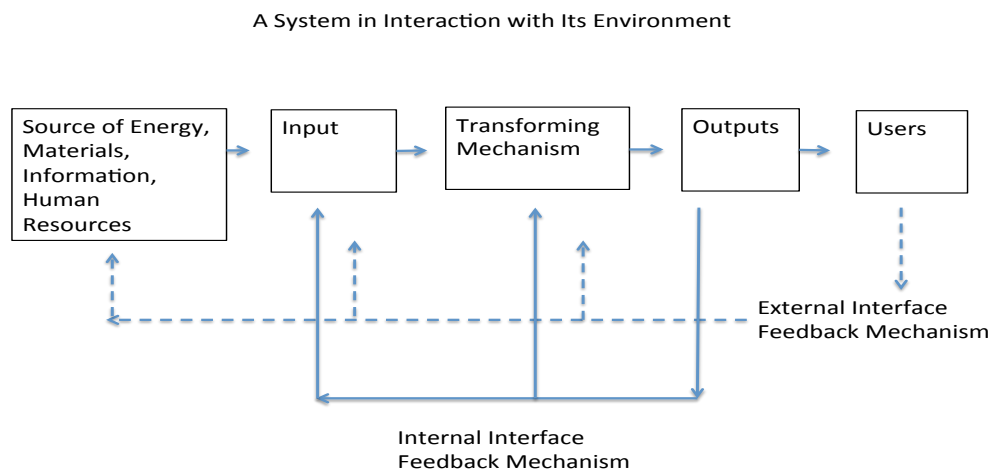


Figure 1: Organizational Development System Flow Chart
(Bell and French, 1999, p. 83).

This flow chart, taken from *Organizational Development* by Bell and French (1999), shows the stages an organization should go through to properly and effectively reflect and introduce change in its internal and external systems. This style of assessment is called an *input-throughput-output* system. It takes a given input (people, money, information), transforms the input into some kind of good or service, and then generates an output that feeds back into the internal and external environments (Bell and French, 1999). In this way, an organization creates dynamic systems through the feedback mechanisms that assure a level of ongoing and varying input from

stakeholders. The system also relies on internal teamwork and self-reflection and external stakeholder input because without those two factors, outputs become less effective and relevant to an organization's constituents, thus negatively impacting an organization's ability to raise funds and sustain itself financially.

Assessment and stakeholder involvement in organizational procedures are not the only steps in building strong organizational systems. Working on team building characteristics in organizational procedures, creating committees that allow for parallel learning structures, looking at old procedural norms to help influence the definition of new procedural norms, and involving stakeholders at every step of the way will better inform a strategic plan for any organization. Action research is inherent in these steps and is defined by Bell and French (1999) as:

“...the process of systematically collecting research data about an ongoing system relative to some objective, goal or need of that system; feeding these data back into the system; taking actions by altering selected variables within the system based both on the data and on the hypothesis; and evaluating the results of actions by collecting more data.”

In this way an organization is never able to stagnate and fall into a negative cycle of supporting the status quo. This is a proactive approach where fact-finding is a key component and collaboration and cooperation are the tools/transformation mechanisms often used to generate creative outputs. When internal and external interface feedback mechanisms for land trusts function jointly, it means that both internal and external stakeholders are being integrated properly into the decision making process for conservation. This then facilitates collaboration on projects and allows for a more comprehensive and inclusive plan for the future of a landscape.

When a land trust uses proper organizational development techniques, it is able to streamline the internal workings of the organization to better integrate stakeholder opinion and need so that the conservation output of a land trusts best reflects what a community wants for its landscape.

Strategic Planning

Having a good strategic plan will make Organizational Development a more fluid process, but oftentimes, the reason organizations need OD work is because they do not have a good strategic plan in the first place. In *Strategic Planning for Public and Private Nonprofit Organizations*, by John M. Bryson, strategic planning is defined as “a deliberative, disciplined approach to producing fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why” (Bryson, 2011). As with OD, strategic planning is based on creating an effective holistic strategy for implementing an organization’s vision and goals. As Bryson explains, the purpose of a nonprofit is to support the needs of the general public in a specific way. For this reason, creating and maintaining public value is essential. If a nonprofit loses touch with what its stakeholders/constituency wants, it will also lose touch with its reason for existing. In organizational development, reflecting on a nonprofit’s purpose is an essential task, and in strategic planning, the tools for taking this step are outlined.

The figure below taken from *Strategic Planning* by Bryson that shows the concept of building a good strategic plan is not complicated, yet it can be deceptively difficult to translate these steps into action.

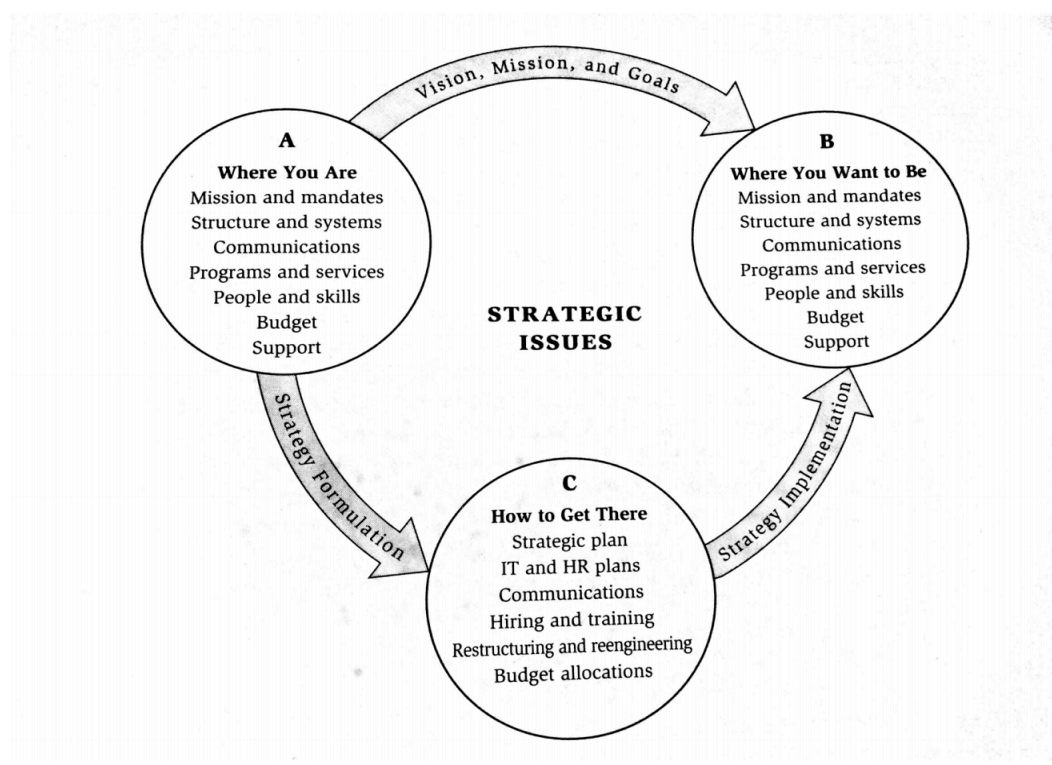


Figure 2: The ABCs of Strategic Planning (Bryson, 2011, p. 11)

While these steps seem straight forward, many organizations have difficulty in defining step A and B, and how that affects C. Bryson explains that in his outline of a good strategic plan, there is no checklist of solutions that need to be applied to every problem. He suggests using an inductive process where organizations explore programming alternatives continuously and reassess on a regular basis. In this way they can make timely changes in order to proceed in an effective manner. He explains that for nonprofits, “over time, more general policies may be formulated to

capture, frame, shape, guide, or interpret the policies, programs, and learning developed to deal with the issues” (Bryson, 2011).

Bryson identifies three key functions that any nonprofit must address in order to achieve its goals: substance, procedure, and policy. He points out that you cannot have good policy without good organizational procedures, and you cannot have good organizational procedures without good substance. However, these three elements must fulfill the strictures of some underlying “procedural rationality” that blends the rationale of each category in an overall vision. In order to achieve “procedural rationality” and a synthesis of all the working parts of a nonprofit, Bryson suggests integrating these ten elements into the organizational development process. By doing so an organization is setting the stage for more effective strategic planning by creating an atmosphere of self-awareness. Being more aware of how an organization functions internally and within a community allows for an informed, relevant, and lasting plan. These ten are:

1. “Initiate and agree on a strategic planning process
 2. Identify organizational mandates
 3. Clarify organizational mission and values
 4. Assess the external and internal environments to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
 5. Identify the strategic issues facing the organization
 6. Formulate strategies to manage the issues
 7. Review and adopt the strategic plan or plans
 8. Establish an effective organizational vision
 9. Develop an effective implementation process
 10. Reassess strategies and the strategic planning process”
- (Bryson, 2011, p. 46)

In this model of strategic planning, developing answers and solutions is not the primary goal, but it is hoped that benefits will arise from a good plan. Bryson makes it clear that if an organization is seeking consensus and agreement, the true nature of

stakeholder involvement is being overlooked. People will not agree with each other all the time, and it is important for a nonprofit to keep this in mind when going ahead with a strategic plan. The organization in question should keep tabs on public opinion so that it can shape and mold programs to generate the greatest amount of support while not sacrificing balance in “procedural rationality”. If the strategy does not work, it is revisited and revised with new stakeholder input.

Allowing for a proper planning process both internally and externally paves the way for dynamic solutions. In the world of land conservation, this means that initiatives will be able to provide deliverables for the concerned constituency of a nonprofit. Organizational stagnation is a looming obstacle for land trusts and happens when there is a lack of self-reflection on an organizational level. Old systems are not evaluated in terms of their efficacy and thus problems are not dealt with and achievements are not identified as swiftly so that they may be recreated in future organizational initiatives. The Strategy Change Cycle is a guide to reflexive planning and can be used to decrease organizational stagnation.

Nonprofit Governance

In *Governance Networks* (2011) by Koliba, Meek, and Zia, the authors explain that any governance network needs boundaries because no organization can be expected to solve all injustices. Limitations must be set so that the mission, vision, and goals for projects become practically achievable. The downside to these boundaries is that an organization consequently limits certain influences, participation levels, and initiative types that might interest some of its constituents

(Koliba, Meek, and Zia, 2011). These boundaries can take two forms referred to as social closure and cognitive closure. Social closure is when boundaries bar all stakeholders or a certain group of stakeholders from the governance network. Cognitive closure is when certain types of information and ideas are ignored or left uninvestigated. Clearly, a dynamic and functioning system is continuously trying to decrease the amount and type of closure detracting from stakeholder participation and access to an organization's deliverables. In my analysis I will describe Input-Output Flows in relation to my coded data, how that affects feedback loops for land trusts, and what implications my findings might have for the greater land trust community in Vermont.

In *Governance Networks*, Koliba et. al. present the following figure showing a basic Input-Output Flow for an organization (Koliba et. al, 2011, p. 171).

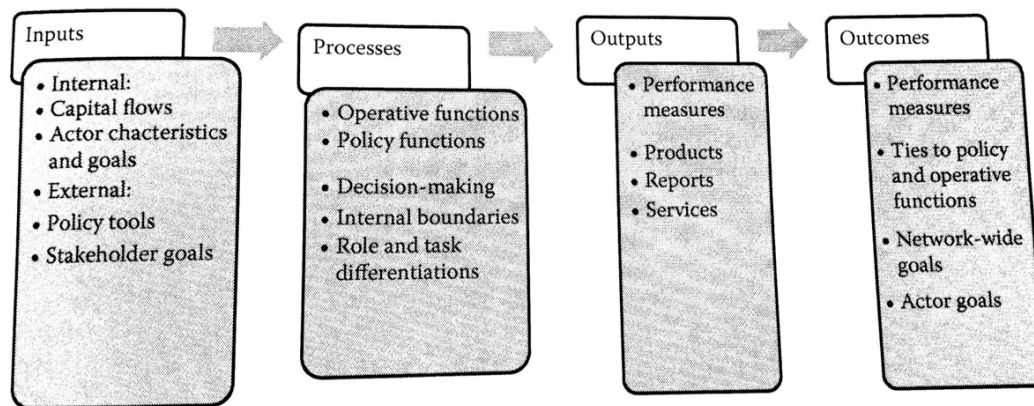


Figure 3: Input-Output Flow

In the first panel, inputs are segregated according to whether they are internal inputs or external inputs. These inputs affect the internal workings of an organization's processes. When filled out in the context of a real life land trust, the inputs of conservation tradition and civic engagement to name a few affect internal processes

such as outreach techniques and stewardship strategies. These processes then impact the products (outputs) that a land trust generates such as easements and stewardship responsibilities. Finally, the outcomes, or the “network-wide goals,” are defined by the preceding variables in the table. These outcomes define a land trust’s values of conservation and shape the nature of the projects they choose to work on.

Frequently nonprofit organizations set goals based on a defined mission and then seek public input to reaffirm the internal decisions made by the organization. This retroactive approach to governance and public participation is called downstream governance, and while there may be short-term benefits in not using up organizational resources to gather information and conduct participation programs, there are long-term consequences that may not be advantageous. With downstream governance, proper organizational development strategies are not used and the input-output flow illustrated earlier becomes disjointed. As explained in OD and Strategic Planning literature, retroactive governance does not allow for adaptation in a nonprofit’s mission and therefore it increases the likelihood of an organization falling out of touch with its constituency. Once a nonprofit no longer understands what its constituency wants, it cannot do the job it was created to do, which is to serve the public. If an organization is proactive about integrating public opinion into the governance process, it may spend more energy implementing participation frameworks, but it will spend less energy in the long run trying to make a square peg fit into a round hole; which is to say – it will be spared discovering at a late date that the public can no longer relate to its mission concept. This proactive approach is

called upstream governance and is explained in the article, *Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice* by Ansell and Gash (2007).

Ansell and Gash explore when and if strategies for aiding consensus-oriented decision-making should be used in nonprofit governance. They believe that collaborative governance is a “response to the failures in downstream implementation and to the high cost and politicization regulation” (Ansell and Gash, 2007). In an environment where collaboration is lacking, not only between a stakeholder group and a nonprofit but between the individual stakeholders themselves, policy efforts, fundraising strategies, and other programs become ineffective due to a lack of general support. In Vermont, this takes the shape of usage disputes where certain community members want access to land for hunting, ATV recreation, mountain biking, or other contentious land uses. Whether a conservation easement limits these uses or not and raises concern with stakeholders who expect certain uses to be prohibited. An organization’s ability to avoid this miscommunication is rooted in the “collective decision making process.” If public opinion is integrated in the beginning stages of a nonprofit program, and even in the drafting of its strategic plan, there is the possibility of a decrease in “adversarialism” among stakeholders and towards the nonprofit in question because issues are addressed before there is a chance for miscommunication. This preliminary dialogue does not solve land use issues, but it creates an environment where people feel as though they are being heard and have a say in the outcome of a conservation project.

Collaborative Governance, Managerialism and Adversarialism

Ansell and Gash (2007) define collaborative governance as “a governing arrangement wherein one or more public agencies engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets” (p. 544). In this definition, it is clear that stakeholders (defined in the quote above as anyone who does not have a paid role in the integrity of the organizational entity in question) have a responsibility in helping to create and dictate effective deliverables from a nonprofit. Stakeholder input must happen routinely so as to continue the OD process of self-reflection and [assessment](#). This stakeholder input is usually in reference to external stakeholders, but there is always the chance that an employee or B.O.D. member needs to be a part of the public input period due to personal ties with a particular conservation initiative.

Ansell and Gash compare three policy-making techniques. The first is collaborative governance, which has been explained, and two others are managerial and adversarial governance. In adversarial governance, an organization attempts to create alliances between adversarial stakeholder groups, however, true consensus is not the end goal. Conflict is accepted as a part of the governing structure and stakeholders do not participate in a collective decision-making process. This strategy avoids time spent integrating stakeholders at the beginnings of a decision making process, but avoids direct engagement with stakeholders and can therefore create a communication breakdown. Managerial governance takes place when organizations make unilateral decisions and reinforce closed feedback loops that can be easy to

implement but do not allow for proper public involvement. This creates a lack of dialogue that reinforces organizational stagnation and an inability to reflect and assess the effectiveness of organizational procedures.

Another type of governance similar to collaborative governance is associational governance and is described as the process of bringing together associations to participate in decision-making. The difference between this form of governance and collaborative governance is that with collaborative governance, formal associations do not need to exist for this process to take place and is far more implicit in its structure (Ansell and Gash, 2007). This means that the role of a stakeholder participating in collaborative governance does not need to be defined within the context of an official state or organizational role. However, in associational governance, stakeholders need to be affiliated with a group or organization.

In *Governance Networks in Public Administration and Public Policy*, Koliba et. al. (2007) explain how social nodes dictate the structure of governance within a community and its nonprofits. A node is an individual or a cluster of people or an organization that functions as a locus of power within a governance network that dictates how social capital flows across nodes. Koiba et. al. talk about nodes from an administrative standpoint for the purpose of highlighting how committees, managers, task forces, advisory groups, and other social decision making groups gain power and affect change. Koliba et. al. state that,

“Oftentimes these groups, committees, task forces, commissions, and authorities serve as the nerve center for network wide operations, providing the physical and virtual spaces for interpersonal coordinated actions and resource exchanges to occur. These groups

have begun to be described as communities of practice” (Koliba et. al., 2011, p.80).

The authors describe these relationships as a way to break away from the limitations of traditional hierarchical governance structures and allow for the cross pollination of ideas between nodes. They emphasize that “...as spaces where knowledge is transferred and decisions are made, and learning is achieved, communities of practice serve as critical features of organizational networks” (Koliba et. al, 2011, p.80). A governance structure needs be created with the goal of accommodating node (internal/external stakeholder) communication so that there is no barrier when people do finally choose to participate in a system (Koliba et al., 2011). This idea of collaboration is effective in theory, but relies on an understanding that there is a certain level of pre-existing social capital between nodes. The motivation for external stakeholders to willingly interact with organizations is not always easy to generate. In many instances, there is a perceived lack of social capital between external stakeholders and organizations such as land trusts that needs to be regenerated through dialogue and the facilitation of discourse between stakeholder groups.

Feedback Loops and Management by Crisis

With any problem, you can either take a preventative approach or a retroactive approach. This idea is at the heart of the conservation issue in Vermont. Do we plan for the conservation needs of the future or do we wait until landscapes are threatened before taking action? When thinking about this process within the framework of a theoretical model, feedback loops define the outcomes of each of these approaches to conservation. Koliba et. al. point out there are three types of

feedback loops. Positive feedback loops are based on the idea of reinforcement of positive occurrences. This idea of reinforcement however, can be interpreted several ways. One example of positive feedback through growth is that an increase in money will create the capacity to generate more money. In this sense, while it is a positive feedback loop, the effects can have negative connotations. On the other hand a positive feedback loop might also mean that health in a natural system begets more health, which has a much more positive connotation.. When something goes right, the system continues to improve. A negative feedback loop is based on the idea of negative reinforcement. If there is a deviation from what is working well in a network, the system is brought back into balance through exterior inputs. This can be good in that when something in a network falls out of balance, the network compensates and fixes the deficit. A negative feedback loop can create problems, however, when it either runs out of resources to fix deficits, or it sets the stage for harmful processes that are allowed to function on the presumption that a shortfall in one area will be balanced by a constructive input at another point in the network (Koliba et. al., 2011).

Management by crisis is a theme that has been prevalent since the beginning of conservation in the United States. In 1872 Ulysses S. Grant allowed for Yellowstone National Park to be formed and set the precedent for future national parks across the country (Nash, 2001). In a modern context, this “fortress conservation” explained in the article “Revamping community-based conservation through participatory research”, by Mulrennan, Mark, and Scott (2012), is not a sustainable model for conservation. When the idea of conservation first described by

Roderick Frazier Nash in *Wilderness and the American Mind* (2001), it was the fastest and most effective way to get the ball of natural preservation rolling. It was in the late 1800s and early 1900s that Americans began to feel nostalgic about their lost frontier and strove to preserve the wilderness qualities of the landscape that industrialization and social progress had left by the way side. Theodore Roosevelt, a proponent of frontier virtues and primitivism helped to create wilderness islands in a sea of modernization (Nash, 2001). Roosevelt made good use of the American Antiquities Act of 1906, which allowed him to set aside land “on which antiquities are situated” (nps.org). He proceeded to proclaim 105 national monuments during his term as president (nps.org). In retrospect, this method of conservation fueled the proliferation of the notion that conservation happens apart from human communities, not within them and surrounding them.

In the conservation landscape of modern day Vermont, this idea of preserving a nostalgic landscape is predominant both in external and internal stakeholder mentalities. In this conservation paradigm the concept of management by crisis is dominant and is based on the fear of loss of land, loss of history, loss of opportunity, and loss of natural beauty, much as in the time of Roosevelt. Crisis as an idea was derived from coded data in this study. While conservation in Vermont might not appear to be in crisis to some, values are in the eye of the beholder and I have chosen to focus on the idea of crisis in conservation based on how my interview subjects have chosen to speak about the issues surrounding conservation in the Duxbury, Stowe, and Vermont Land Trusts. When a piece of property with deep cultural meaning is threatened, a community will rally around the preservation of

their heritage and landscape tradition so as to protect an inherited idea of cultural identity. With this model, people do not come to the realization that they want to preserve something until it is threatened. This is a reactive approach to conservation.

The trend of dealing with crises as they come can be described as an incremental system for conservation planning. Changes are made to the conservation system when the need arises. In the article 'Muddling Through' by Charles Lindblom, this idea of incremental policy change is discussed. Lindblom talks about the fact that in certain circumstances it can be beneficial to deal with issues incrementally because it is unrealistic to think that wholesale change can occur in a rapid and lasting manner. His argument is that there will always be people who disagree with reasons for change in a system, and the best way to deal with naysayers is to slowly work towards a goal over time. As Lindblom states,

“[s]hifts of policy within a party take place largely through a series of relatively small changes, as can be seen in their only gradual acceptance of the idea of governmental responsibility...”(Lindblom 1959, p.85).

In this model of change, there is a certain level of acceptance of whatever the current state of affairs may be with regards to a particular contested issue. This is not a model for social and environmental revolution, but rather outlines a way to slowly and unobtrusively change public opinion and goals. This technique does, however, take time, and there is never an assurance that enough change will take place to make a notable difference in policy. Incremental change is a retroactive approach to issues whereas the techniques described in strategic planning are more proactive.

External Systems

External Systems describe how a land trust interacts with surrounding communities and stakeholders. To highlight the most important components of these systems, there will first be a review of the role of *social capital* in defining conservation values for stakeholders and communities. I will then look into how land trusts manage these values through *stewardship* of conservation land and incorporation of public *participation* in conservation initiatives.

Social Capital

It is important to understand why a community might decide to conserve a part of their landscape. Here in Vermont, the pastoral landscape is not just a way to support the state's economy; it speaks to hundreds of years of agricultural traditions and defines how Vermonters see themselves in the great scope of humanity. The rolling hills, red barns, ski resorts, and sugar bushes are just a few of the economies and picturesque features that make up the identity of the green mountain state. It is this same identity that many organizations such as state and community land trusts try to preserve and foster for future generations.¹ The Vermont landscape is a community norm and an aesthetic expectation. In this way it is an integral factor in what comprises the identities of individual citizens and communities as a whole.

Social capital is the fabric that unites communities, but varies in strength based on a community's past experiences and stakeholder groups. There are three

¹ “**Social Capital** comprises the human connections that weave us together, measured by such factors as trust, reciprocity, social networks, and community norms and expectations. Like all forms of capital, it can be invested in—or not—and drawn from” (Clark and Teachout, *Slow Democracy* 2012, 136.)

types of social capital, bridging, bonding and linking. In Koliba et. al. (2011), these three categories are defined:

“Bonding social capital: Characterized by strong bonds (or ‘social glue’), for example, among family members or among members of an ethnic group.

Bridging social capital: Characterized by weaker, less dense but more crosscutting ties (‘social oil’), for example between business associates, acquaintances, friends from different ethnic groups, friends of friends etc.

Linking social capital: Characterized by connections between those with different levels of power or social status, for example, links between the political elite and the general public, or between individuals from different classes.”(p. 90)

Conservation in Vermont is influenced by all of these types of social capital. For the her Master of Science degree at the University of Vermont, Bethany Hanna focused her thesis, *The Role of Town Forests on Promoting Community Engagement and Fostering Sense of Place (2005)*, on the subject of social capital and conservation. In her studies she examined how community involvement in the management process for a town forest can foster future potential for stewardship practices. To do this she looked at a selection of case studies based in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. Each case study was chosen based on a “high degree of community activity in the forest itself, a strong sense of place concerning the forest, and active forest planning that contributes to forestland stewardship” (Hanna, 2005). Once she settled on appropriate communities for her study, she then asked two questions about each community.

1. “What biophysical conditions, institutional arrangements, sources of knowledge, outreach events, stewardship and monitoring activities, and

leadership qualities the model town forests have in common and which ones are unique?”

2. “How might these characteristics assist in promoting community engagement, building social capital, fostering sense of place, and increasing forestland stewardship.”
(Hanna, 2005)

Her conclusion was that a positive relationship exists between the town forests in her cases studies and community involvement. She also noted the formation of increased personal connections with the landscape based on community outreach and educational initiatives that were provided by town select boards in charge of the promotion and perpetuation of their model town forests.

Hanna went on to explain that there is often a group of selected individuals that are asked to be spokespeople for a community on land management issues. This group of people is responsible for interfacing with land trusts and making sure that easement guidelines are being followed while at the same time making sure that community needs for a landscape are being met. Hanna wrote, “In most cases, the ultimate authority over town forest management rests with the town select board, a group of elected officials who oversee town governance. A conservation commission or town forest committee may or may not advise the selectboard depending upon whether such a commission exists in the town” (Hanna, 2005). Land Trusts use these channels for communicating with their constituency, but the details of external stakeholder involvement is important in understanding what level of participation is both expected and needed for any given conservation initiative.

In the last analysis, a management plan must represent a community’s conservation ethic. If there is a lack of social capital in a community that prevents external stakeholders from coming forward and voicing their conservation concerns

to a land trust, it will be much harder to know what level of involvement a land trust's constituency should have in the planning process. As Hanna explained, if there is already a greater amount of social capital in a community due to past positive experiences with a conserved landscape, a constituency is more likely to be involved in future conservation initiatives without any motivation. If this is not the case, however, then tactics to facilitate a dialogue between stakeholders should be explored.

A land trust must assess the inherent social capital of a community and then apply management and participation techniques to gain a level of engagement from a community that is necessary for effective planning. If a land trust, however, comes up against a great degree of land use conflict there may not be enough social capital to fuel participation and dialogue. If that is the case, a stakeholder analysis and collaborative environmental planning can help to further the participation process.

Stewardship and Participation

For each land trust, the mission statement will likely vary, but stewardship goals are usually standard. As the Vermont Land Trust states, “with each conservation success comes a deep and permanent responsibility: we have promised to look after, or steward, the conservation protections placed on this land forever” (<http://www.vlt.org/>). It is important that land trust employees involved in conservation are dedicated to stewardship, but in the case of B.O.D. members, as chosen representatives of a constituency they also run the risk of overlooking or misinterpreting stakeholder intentions for a landscape. The integration of the

stakeholder into the conservation is essential in creating land management plans for the Vermont landscape that are drafted by and for communities, not agencies or organizations. There can be many interpretations of the concept of Stewardship. The Land Trust Alliance defines stewardship in its book, *The Conservation Easement Handbook* (2005), as “all aspects of managing a conservation easement after its acquisition: monitoring, landowner relations, recordkeeping, processing amendments and landowner notices and requests for approval, managing stewardship funds, and enforcement and defense” (p. 3). In effect stewardship can mean any and everything that takes place after the inception of a conservation initiative. Stewardship as defined by Byers and Ponte is,

“the activities necessary to ensure that the terms of the easement agreement are upheld. These activities generally include raising and managing stewardship funds; conducting regular monitoring; building landowner relations; keeping reliable records; processing landowner notices and requests for approval; dealing with amendment requests; dealing with banks and potential buyers; operating volunteer and staffed stewardship programs; and enforcing, in the event of a violation,” (Byers and Ponte, 2005, p.116).

Because of stewardship’s broad scope, it can take many forms, either including just a few or all of the aspects listed above. Stewardship can entail the goals of one individual or land trust, but it can also be more holistic in nature, involving community members and relationships between and among multiple conservation organizations. The idea that an institution like stewardship can be enforced by one person or one entity vs. a group of informed and engaged citizens is at the heart of a political debate that author Benjamin Barber discusses in his book *Strong Democracy*.

In *Strong Democracy*, Barber explains from a political standpoint the problem with representation vs. participation. Passive citizens, he concludes, are created when

they feel no connection between themselves and the lawmakers and administrators who have been chosen to govern.

“By subordinating the will and judgment of citizens to abstract norms about which there can be no real consensus, these modes [representative modes] demean citizenship itself and diminish correspondingly the capacities of a people to govern itself...citizens become subject to laws they did not truly participate in making; they become passive constituents of representatives who, far from reconstituting the citizens’ aims and interests, usurp their civic functions and deflect their civic energies” (Barber, 2011, p.147).

This quote is worded strongly and refers to the changes that Barber believes need to happen within our current governmental state to begin to create a “strong democracy” in the wake of a “thin democracy.” Although Barber refers to a more general problem, there are many parallels that can be drawn between the role of stewards and the “representatives” that Barber speaks of. Within the paradigm of a “thin democracy,” a small organization can face the same challenges to public participation as an entire nation. In order to draft a comprehensive land management plan, a land trust should engage its constituency actively. As with a “thin democracy” model, when a land trust that uses a “representative” model in taking on all stewardship responsibilities and enforcement, some power of decision-making is taken away from stakeholders/community members and consequently limits certain land use opportunities. This “representative” structure is inevitable when there are employees and B.O.D. members who make decisions for a land trust, but if this is the case, it is important for land trusts to be conscious of this dynamic and actively include external stakeholders to broaden the conservation perspective for an organization.

Two books, *Public Participation in Public Decisions* by John Clayton Thomas (1995) and *Democracy in Practice* by Beierle and Cayford (2002), discuss the question of how to achieve public participation, and can be applied to the stakeholder involvement issues facing land trusts in Vermont. Both books ask a key question to determine the type and level of input needed from a community member and/or stakeholder. The question is: “What should it [the system] do for whom?” (Thomas, 1995). In the case of a Vermont based land trust, the question becomes, Why are we conserving land, and for whom? Without asking this question, it is more difficult for a land trust to understand the goals of the community they serve. It is in the wake of a land trust asking this question that stakeholders have a chance to express their opinion and play a role in an conservation outcome. Both books identify a notable caveat which is that a stakeholder might not have access to the same quality of information on which to base decisions as a paid administrator. Beierle and Cayford explain, “one of the emerging challenges to the growing role of public participation is concern that the public makes bad decisions” (Beierle and Cayford, 2002, p.27). In the case of land conservation, it might be true that the average citizen might not be completely informed about the tax structure of a conservation easement or the wildlife corridors that need to be preserved on a piece of land, but neither of these knowledge deficits should prevent a stakeholder from participating in a dialogue about future land use goals.

In the beginning of *Democracy in Practice*, Beierle and Cayford list the five steps for public participation:

1. “Incorporating public values into decisions
2. Improving the substantive quality of decisions

3. Resolving conflict among competing interests
 4. Building trust in institutions
 5. Educating and informing the public”
- (Beierle and Cayford, 2002, p. 6)

If these steps are taken by administrators in land trusts, there may still be instances where a stakeholder does not have sufficient information to make a quality decision for planning purposes, but more often than not, if the correct methods are followed to educate and involve people, efficient public participation will be achieved and a collaborative and integrative plan will pave the way for sustainable communities living in sustainable landscapes in Vermont. The level of participation needed in order to make quality decisions is debatable, but the fact remains that if a stakeholder (a community member who cares about conservation) is interested in the future of their surrounding landscape, they are responsible for a certain level of engagement. If there are no avenues available for participation, however, a stakeholder is less likely to fulfill their civic duty.

In light of public participation as a quality method for advancing holistic conservation efforts for a community, the next question becomes, what are the most effective ways to involve stakeholders in the Conservation process that allow for an appropriate level of public participation? Do you hold forums, design charettes, town meetings, annual meeting? Do you use surveys and/or interviews? This is a question that can only be answered by looking at the many stakeholder groups that are involved in conservation initiatives and understanding their motivations for engagement (or lack there of) in a conservation project. These participatory

techniques, if chosen well, can help break down the barriers of preconceived notions of conservation and what impact it has on a community.

Conservation easements are often seen as a great vehicle for community improvement and natural preservation. They offer an opportunity for a community to make a lasting impact on a landscape by preserving a view, a habitat, or a type of land use, and assuring that the cherished piece of land will remain secure in perpetuity. This is beneficial in many ways as it provides a lasting natural resource for current and future generations and allows a community to form strong ties with its environment. Sadly, this positive outcome is not always guaranteed. In Vermont land trusts are a commonly used tool for land conservation but along with the initial financial crutch that allows communities to set aside public land, comes the long term consequence of a smaller property tax base due to the land trust's non-profit status. The burden of making up for this deficit rests on the community and therefore land that sits in easement status can negatively affect the year round community if the uses of the conserved land do not make up for the added cost to taxpayers (Brighton, 2009).

In their 2004 article, "Equilibrium Behavior in the Conservation Easement Game", Anderson and King explore the idea of economic game theory as it applies to conservation easements. They note:

"Because the decision to conserve is based primarily on private incentives, the monetary and non-monetary benefits that accrue to the landowner, it is not necessarily the case that the total public value provided by conserving the land exceeds the increased tax burden shouldered by other town residents" (Anderson and King, 2004).

They describe five key factors that influence a stakeholder's decision to advocate for or oppose land being placed in a conservation easement. These five factors are:

1. "The legal requirement to pay taxes on the full market value of the land;
2. The future opportunities to sell the land into development or other uses;
3. The agricultural (or other current use) value of the land;
4. The altruistic incentive to provide natural amenities to other community members; and:
5. The altruistic incentive not to shift tax burden to other community members;" (Anderson and King, 2004, p. 358).

These five factors are intrinsically at odds with each other, and because of this, the various stakeholders may see one or the other of these different factors as the most important. Thus there can be conflicts of interest and difficulty in writing a collaborative and integrative management plan. In light of the five factors listed above, Anderson and King discuss financial motivations versus altruistic motivations. Their conclusion as to whether or not a stakeholder will truly choose public good over private profitability is that private profitability will always win out, therefore conservation is fundamentally always a private endeavor, not a public one (Anderson and King, 2004). In an analysis on short-term and long-term impacts of land conservation on Vermont property taxes Deb Brighton, a Legislative Tax Policy Consultant explains that understanding how a town's tax base is affected by a conservation easement is more complicated than the idea that once land is off the tax rolls for a town, the taxes go up (<http://www.vlt.org/>). Variables such as: acres conserved in town, value of all taxable property in town, number of primary residences in town, value of commercial and industrial property in town, and finally, vacation property value as percentage of total taxable property value also affect a tax

base and are directly related to the quality of living in which conservation plays a key role. Her study speaks to the common question of whether a town could be making more money and contributing more to the tax base through development of the property proposed for conservation. Brighton explains that there is a price for development and often this cost is not taken into account when arguing against conservation easements. Furthermore, in the case of taxes being affected by conservation work done by a government agency such as the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR, who often works with local land trusts in the conservation process to leverage state support and funding for conservation), the ANR is required to make payments to the town in lieu of taxes lost to conservation, and oftentimes they overcompensate. In this way, many taxpayers see their tax rates decline as a result of a conservation easement.

While financial issues might be a motivation for participation from an external standpoint, there is the issue of internal stakeholder participation in the conservation process that has more to do with volunteer commitment. One of the main barriers to internal stakeholder engagement and participation is volunteer fatigue. In small communities, the same stakeholders are often relied upon time and time again to initiate progress with a certain project. This can be tiresome for those individuals who find themselves shouldering a greater part of the workload while not being paid. In “Organizational Factors Affecting Volunteers” by Schnurbein and Studer, 2013, the dynamics of volunteering and volunteer burnout are discussed. They say volunteer motives are “ multidimensional” and that they “contain altruistic as well as egoistic elements”(Schnurbein and Studer , 2013 p.405). No matter what the impetus

might be for someone to choose to volunteer, if his or her services are misused or overused, there is the chance that the volunteer may suffer from burnout. In “Volunteering” by John Wilson, the topic of commitment is discussed. Wilson explains,

“Volunteer burnout is a serious problem for administrators, particularly where the work is costly or risky. This is one of the several reasons why volunteer organizations have quite high turnover rates. Lack of resources can help explain some of the dropout rate...Level of satisfaction with current volunteering seems to have little to do with commitment, and people who stop volunteering rarely say that they did so because of low job satisfaction. They are more likely to say their efforts went unrecognized, their skills and interests were not properly matched with the assignments they were given, or they were not given enough autonomy or freedom to help those they wished to serve” (Wilson 2000 p. 230-231).

Wilson is making the argument that people need to be acknowledged for the services they are providing their community for free and without that positive reinforcement, many people stop volunteering after a certain period of time. It can be hard in volunteer situations such as the ones found at the SLT and VLT because there are paid employees and volunteers and that can create an imbalance in the organizational power structure. Schnurbein and Studer believe that paid staff need to be “volunteer friendly” and that there needs to be a strategic plan for how to involve volunteers so as to better utilize everyone’s abilities at the right time and place. This decreases the feeling among volunteers that they are wasting their time and knowledge that they have donate to an organization (Schnurbein and Studer, 2013). This method describes the integration of external stakeholders into an internal organizational process with internal stakeholders.

Organizational Collaboration

Land trusts in Vermont often work with other organizations and state agencies to help with operational and land purchase costs. Conservation is neither cheap nor easy and the effectiveness of land trust work is based on the resources available to that organization. Relationships and partnerships within a community are fundamental if they are to project success in a land trust conservation effort. While land trusts are able to raise funds independently for the purchase of a proposed parcel, often times financial aid is needed to conserve a piece of land. Help in this area can come from the State, but there are also NGOs whose role it is to provide financial backing for land deals. The NGO that has had the most impact in the state of Vermont as a partnering conservation facilitator is the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB). As stated on the VHCB website,

“The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board is an independent, state-supported funding agency providing grants, loans and technical assistance to nonprofit organizations, municipalities and state agencies for the development of perpetually affordable housing and for the conservation of important agricultural land, recreational land, natural areas and historic properties in Vermont” (<http://www.vhcb.org/>).

The VHCB was designed as a “quasi public foundation that supports a network of community-based nonprofits throughout Vermont” (Libby and Bradley, 2000). By creating this organization, it was hoped that a more holistic plan for the Vermont landscape would be realized through the collaboration of private and public interests. The founders of the VHCB believed that the rural character of Vermont should be conserved but not without taking into account the economic viability and social health of communities that make up the traditional landscape pattern. In the early days of land trusts in Vermont, the Vermont Land Trust hatched the idea to spread

the risk of maintenance and stewardship among numerous organizations so as to provide financial stability for conservation projects through the diversification in easement holders. The co-holding of easements is now a commonplace occurrence and allows for small community land trusts to be able to afford conservation initiatives that would not have been financially feasible otherwise (Libby and Bradley, 2000).

The State of Vermont plays a role in the VHCB process, and has influenced the conservation objectives of the organization since its founding. The VHCB was initially conceived as an organization dedicated to the conservation of farmland. This first mission, however, did not garner state support. The founders then added the goals of supporting the conservation of wildlife, historic buildings, and recreation, but it was not until affordable housing was added to the mix that the state stepped in to fund VHCB. Initially \$23 million was appropriated to allow VHCB to provide its services. This number was increased when the state additionally agreed to allocate a portion of the property transfer tax receipts to the budget (Libby and Bradley, 2000). There has been a long history of partnerships made to achieve conservation goals in the state of Vermont, and in many ways, the VHCB set an example at its outset for how multiple interested parties could join forces and bring together disparate pieces of the Vermont economy and landscape to create a more integrated fabric of land management for environmental and social health. This systems thinking approach to conservation in the policy arena has influenced a slow but distinct shift in the greater intents of land trusts throughout the state. As Libby and Bradley explain,

“For the land trust community, there is a realization that economic and community health is as important as environmental health to

Vermont's rural communities. Land Trusts are looking for other ways to incorporate other societal goals into their projects"(Libby and Bradley, 2000, p. 268).

While the VHCB is not the only external entity that aids land trusts in the conservation process, it does have the farthest reach across the state. There are local conservation commissions in towns that help with projects, and other special interest groups that can raise funds and co-hold an easement based on the vision and goals for a particular property. The VHCB is the role model for these smaller or less experienced NGOs who want to participate in the conservation process.

For the Vermont Land Trust, another key partner is the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that is an offshoot of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The NRCS was founded in 1935 and works to develop standards and regulations for land and water resources. The NRCS believes that by helping individual conservation projects, they have a greater effect on the overall health of an ecosystem. In this way they influence decisions made about the proper use for a singular piece of land based on its role in the ecosystem at large. The NRCS also hold easements or collaborates with other partners in the easement process through providing the necessary finances. In the case of the VLT, the NRCS most often acts as a partner in funding and technical assistance through the Farm Bill that allocates federal money to agricultural viability across the U.S.. Often, the funds that the NRCS provides through the Farm Bill are matched by the state to purchase agricultural easements (<http://www.vlt.org/>).

There are many private funders who contribute to conservation initiatives in Vermont including foundations and funds such as the Freeman Foundation and the

John Merck Fund, two primary partners for the VLT. There are also many small foundations and community land trusts that act as partners for funding and technical support for land trusts. The VLT works with a long list of such supporters. The Stowe Land Trust has a slightly smaller scope of partners, and as a community land trust, they work primarily with the VHCB, the Town of Stowe and its conservation commission, private landowners, and every so often, the State of Vermont (<http://www.stowelandtrust.org/>). The Duxbury Land Trust only stewards a handful of conservation initiatives, and its primary partners are the VHCB and the VLT. Due to Duxbury's relatively small fundraising reach the DLT must rely on large organizations to provide the majority of the funding for a conservation project which is helpful when there is a need to co-hold an easement but can be limiting if there is a proposed project that the VLT or the VHCB have less interest in.

Collaborations and partnerships are a step towards holistic planning through the integration of multiple organizations with multiple stakeholder groups. These relationships do add a level of complexity to the already complicated procedure of easement enactment, but the fact that these organizations are willing to work together makes it possible for conservation to happen on both a small community scale and a large state wide scale.

Crisis Management outside Vermont

When investigating negative feedback loops in conservation throughout the world, the most common reference to the cycle of management by crisis is by conservation biologists who are seeing negative feedback loops with the

management of wildlife areas that contain threatened or endangered species. Crisis management is threat driven, and what this means in the world of conservation is that there is a threat to a landscape in some form. This could be the threat of development, the threat of pollution, or the threat of habitat loss and extinction to name a few. With the threat of species extinction and habitat loss there has been a trend in conservation biology to prioritize the conservation of high-risk areas with regards to ecological degradation. There is, however, some debate over the effectiveness of conservation based on urgency because it does not tie in a holistic plan for ecological systems and wilderness conservation at large. In Australia, there have been studies conducted that illustrate the importance of conservation planning instead of using a management by crisis model. As Carwardine et. al. explains,

“While this threat-based approach to spatial prioritization, targeting a snapshot of vulnerable biodiversity and landscape, is logical in the short term given the accelerating anthropogenic threats and past impacts, it may not be sufficient to ensure the long-term persistence of biodiversity at regional and continental scales in the face of future threats and limited funding”(Carwardine et. al, 2009, p.1029).

The study done by Carwardine et. al. talks about the need for the mapping of projected threatened zones to create a more strategic plan for conservation in Australia. They conclude that the best strategy for fast, cost effective, long-term conservation is employing both short-term and long-term strategies. They describe this as identifying areas that are under immediate threat, but making sure that these high-risk areas are referenced against the long-term plan to connect large tracts of wilderness land. They suggest using predictive models that can forecast threats and including the costs of conservation within a management plan (Carwardine et. al,

2009). Another study focusing on Australian conservation techniques argues for “informed opportunism.” This is defined as conservation that “lies between these extremes, ‘taking advantage of conservation openings as they arise, but with explicit recognition of the trade-offs involved’”(Bottrill and Pressey, 2008, p.1342). As Bottrill and Pressey conclude, “moving from ‘crisis to informed inspiration’ in conservation biology involves several kinds of knowledge, including clear perceptions of threats and effective ways of responding to them, Otherwise, our inspiration will not be informed” (Borttrill and Pressey, 2008, p.1344).

In Colorado, the debate about land threat has centered on the idea of rapid development and what kind of social impacts conservation has on the landscape if parcels are conserved in urgency to stave off human encroachment on wilderness. In the article by Ernst et. al, Private Land Conservation (PLC) in Laramie County in Colorado is discussed. They explain that in order to protect rapidly developing areas of Colorado’s front range, communities must look to private land conservation to be able to preserve natural corridors that abut wilderness areas. The argument is made that private land conservation can be an effective and quick response, but lacks a certain degree of strategic planning. Ernst et. al. concludes that PLC provides, “a better understanding of and value placed on social-ecological-economic systems at work in a given location even if true conservation planning is lacking” (Ernst et. al. 2008, p.295). This effectively means that PLC integrates social values into conservation in addition to ecological values. The concession is made, however, that this technique lends itself to a pattern of management based on a sense of urgency. As Ernst et. al. discuss,

“Moving beyond biological assessment techniques to implementation will require conservation biologists and other scientists to become involved in and learn from the land-use planning and decision processes already occurring at the level of local government. This is where PLC is being operationalized, albeit often in a frequently opportunistic fashion driven by development pressure” (Ernst et. al. 2008, p.295).

This article brings up the important issue of planning for ecological goals apart from social needs for a landscape. It is difficult when a conservation plan is trying to balance both natural and social objectives for a landscape. Ernst et. al. present no solution to this problem, but they suggest that PLC may increase community support for conservation initiatives.

In a study done in 2007 by Jeffrey C. Milder, a professor at Cornell University, he talks about the encroaching threat of development and how the current system used by Land Trust in the U.S. is potentially an inadequate tool for conserving land in a holistic manner. He explains that.

“In the United States, conservationists typically seek to [protect landscapes and their conservation values mainly by purchasing or obtaining land and conservation easements. Although this approach has been relatively successful on many regions-in part because of the recent growth of the land trust movement-it is proving inadequate in areas with substantial development pressure and escalating land values, where conservationists are losing ground to the larger, better-funded real estate development industry” (Milder, 2007, p.758).

Milder goes on to clarify that the techniques currently used by conservation organizations are too fragmentary to keep up with the rapid growth of the development industry. He believes that “conservation development” will help with this fragmentation issue. This is a method of conservation where development is

accepted as a part of the landscape and integrated into easement regulations. Certain critical areas of a parcel are preserved while others that are better suited to development are left available with restrictions. This conservation development, depending on the strategy, could simply mean allowing for a single-house building envelope on a parcel of conserved land. It could mean actual open market sales of the developed portion of the property to multiple owners, but would be restricted to less development than zoning would allow for without conservation restrictions.

In this way people around the world are trying to deal with this idea of management by crisis and come up with solutions that limit fragmentation of wildlife habitat and other natural resources. This literature speaks to the idea that there is an understanding of a need for a solution to piece meal conservation but it can be hard to find a formula that can be applied to all parts of the globe. In many ways, the assessment of local needs drives what the solutions look like for future conservation management.

Chapter 3: Methods

Research Design:

In designing a study that would examine the social landscape of conservation in Vermont I decided to look at both the internal and external interactions between stakeholders for a select group of land trusts. My objective was to understand more about why land trusts chose to conserve certain pieces of property, what the process was for making those choices, who participated in the decision making process, and to what extent their opinions affected the contents of an easement. In order to find answers to these questions, I needed to break my study down into manageable parts so that I could take an in-depth look at stakeholder interactions. It would not have been feasible to look at all 35 land trusts in Vermont, so I decided to study a select group of land trusts that might be indicative of a greater paradigm within the conservation world in Vermont. I needed both large and small land trusts so that I could see the difference in governance structure and also begin to understand how stakeholder interactions with land trusts differ based on size and availability of resources.

I selected the Vermont Land Trust as my state land trust case study based on membership statistics for the VLT gathered by the Land Trust Alliance. As the largest state land trust, it has the potential to represent a spectrum of conservation efforts and stakeholder interests throughout Vermont. I wanted to learn more about how land trusts reach out to communities and engage community and state partners, and the VLT was an obvious choice as it has had a long history of collaboration with

other organizations. The VLT is one of the most identifiable land trusts in Vermont so I was also hoping to be able to gather a greater degree of public opinion on the role land trusts play in the conservation landscape in Vermont.

It was my hope that studying the VLT would give me the broader view of how conservation works across multiple regions in Vermont, but I knew that I needed to choose a few land trusts to study that were more region/community specific. I did not want to conduct a comparative study between community and statewide land trusts as I felt that a project of that scale would be too great an undertaking for a masters thesis, but I did want to have data that represented a spectrum of stakeholder involvement ranging from small projects such as conserving swimming holes and other community specific initiatives to larger projects that deal with the conservation of hundreds of acres of land and affecting multiple communities. To do this I looked through the census data and found both the largest and smallest community land trusts in Vermont. By these standards, Stowe Land Trust was my choice for a study subject as the largest community land trust (an accredited Land Trust Alliance land trust) and the Duxbury Land Trust as the smallest community land trust in Vermont (not accredited).

At the inception of my study, I had some themes that I knew I wanted learn more about (described on pages 7-8). To do this I decided to interview stakeholders from each land trust for my study. I chose interviews over a survey because I wanted to get a depth of personal opinion about the subjects I was studying. I wanted stories about public interaction with land trusts, accounts of specific projects, and a sense of the beliefs and feelings in the world of land trust conservation in Vermont. I knew

this approach would allow me to better understand why people chose to interact or not interact with their local and statewide land trust.

Once I had decided on interviews as my method for data collection, I outlined themes that I knew I would want to include in my interview schedule for each stakeholder. To be able to draft meaningful questions, I knew that I would need to lay out the structure of stakeholder relationships. I wanted to visualize my analysis so that I could effectively ask questions that would provoke meaningful answers.

I began my organizational model by parsing out the broad units of analysis made up of statewide and community land trusts. Within the broader units of analysis defined by each separate land trust in my study, there were sub groups, or embedded units of analysis, defined by the three land trusts I chose to study. Within these three units there were two types of stakeholders within each conservation organization. To better illustrate these units of analysis, I created a project Matrix shown below.

Land Trust Project Matrix

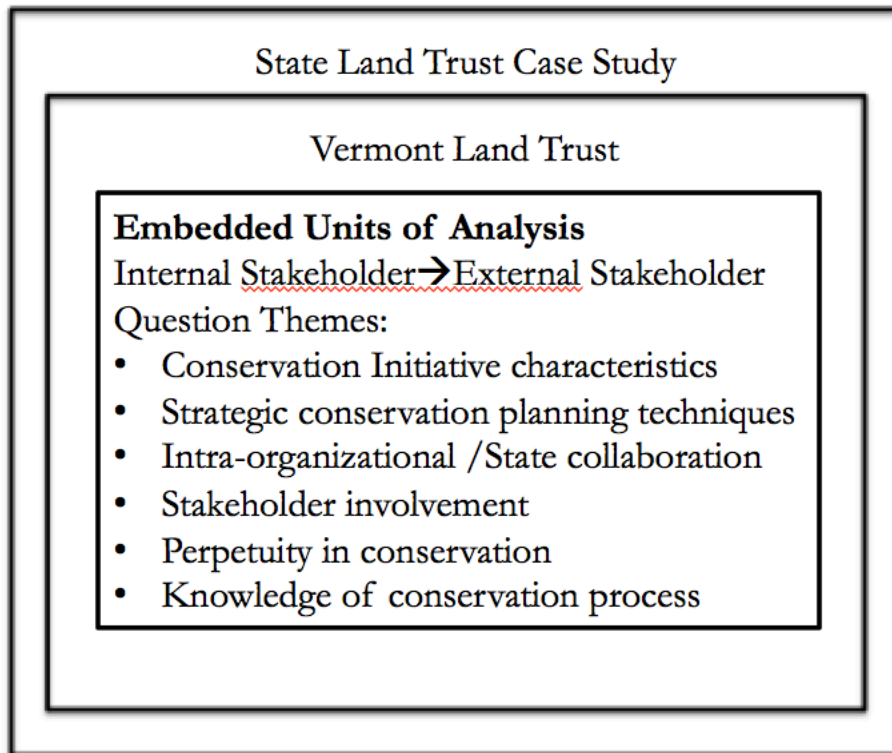


Figure 4: Land Trust Project Matrix: State Land Trust Case Study

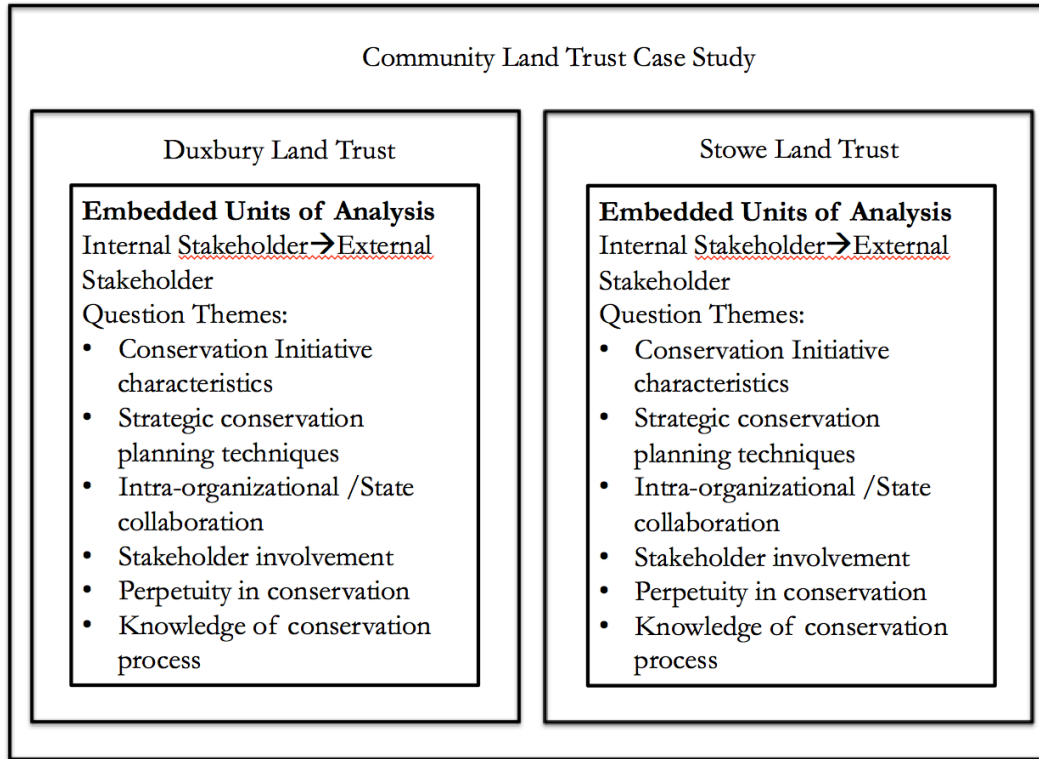


Figure 5: Land Trust Project Matrix: Community Land Trust Case Study

Once I had this matrix laid out, I was able to refer to this visual as a guideline for who I would chose to interview and what questions I would ask to get rich data about the themes listed above.

Data Collection Procedure:

I chose my interview subjects by looking for people who were associated with land trusts both internally and externally, and who I knew to be involved in land trusts processes or who were identified as good sources of information for this project by people involved with the land trusts in question. I knew that a random selection would potentially be detrimental to my study because I would not be able know whether or not a randomly selected community member would have any

opinions about their local land trust. I had to hand pick my subjects to a certain degree to assure that I would have a relatively informed answer for all of the questions I would be asking. This created a certain bias, as I either needed to know of the subject or have someone recommend an interviewee. I was willing to sacrifice a certain level of objectivity in favor of hopefully receiving quality answers to my interview questions. It was my goal to collect rich data, and so while using the snowball method of choosing interview subjects is a technique that can be criticized for its reliance on trust within a sample group, it was important that each interview subject had an investment in conservation in some way. Based on my project matrix, I decided to interview both internal and external stakeholders so that I could learn about how community members view conservation as either employees or volunteers of a land trust, or as outsiders to the organization who only interact with a land trust if they so chose. To have a manageable study I decided to keep my interviewee pool to around 12-13 people. With this number in mind, I decided to interview two internal and two external stakeholders for each land trusts in the study. For the category of internal stakeholders I wanted to try and interview one paid employee and one Board of Directors member to get different perspectives for this category. I also made sure that I interviewed one male and one female for both internal and external stakeholder categories. I attempted to break down my categories further into age groups, but was not able to achieve an even breakdown in age for my sample because of the size limitations for each land trusts. With such few employees for all three land trusts, I was not able to break down my study into a look at stakeholders and employees from differing age groups because there simply

was not a varying age of stakeholders to choose from. For the Duxbury and Stowe land trusts, my selection for internal stakeholders was limited due to the size of the organizations. For Stowe, there were only three employees and I interviewed the first person to respond to my request. In the interview with this employee, I asked for a recommendation for a B.O.D. member who might have the time to sit down with me for an interview. I was directed to a person had been on the board for a number of year and had a more comprehensive understanding of the organizational structure of the Stowe Land Trust. For Duxbury, there were no paid employees so I interviewed the first people to respond to my request for an interview. I then asked the internal stakeholders if they had suggestions for whom to approach as an external stakeholder interview subject. Again, while this process was biased due to my reliance on the recommendations of B.O.D. members and employees, it was the only way for me to make sure that my subjects would have some interest in land trusts and their role in a community. For the Vermont Land Trust, my approach to choosing subjects was influenced by my work with the Town of Wells in southern Vermont for a class project at the University of Vermont. My task for the class was to draft a management plan for a conservation easement called the Delaney Property. In doing this, I worked with stakeholders in the town so that I could understand what they wanted for their land in the future. The conservation of the Delaney property was made possible with support from the Vermont Land Trust. Due to this relationship that I already had with the townspeople in Wells and with the Vermont Land Trusts employees who helped with this project, I chose to interview internal and external stakeholders who participated in the process of creating an easement for

the Delaney property. My previous studies allowed me to ask questions that could probe more deeply into the impetus for certain decisions in the conservation process and how people interacted with the Vermont Land Trust through this time. I knew that it would be hard to find a common theme in the data between internal and external stakeholders for the Vermont Land Trusts component to my study without picking a specific region, and this was the perfect opportunity to capitalize on relationships that I had already formed.

Study subjects were initially contacted via email and then asked to meet for a formal hour long recorded interview. At the initiation of the interview, it was made clear that all personal identification information would be confidential and the material presented in this study would in no way incriminate any of the test subjects. All subjects were deemed appropriate based on the IRB standard and were treated in an ethical manner. Concepts and themes that I generated based on my research completed prior to my interviews were integrated into a series of questions that I asked subjects. I generated two different interview schedules so that I could gain a more specific understanding of the different roles internal and external stakeholders have in the land trust conservation process. To begin the interview drafting process, I had two interview guidelines, one for internal stakeholders and one for external stakeholders as shown in Appendix A and B. The interview guidelines for both stakeholder categories started with asking the interviewee to tell me a story about why they wanted to participate in the conservation process in the beginning. . With this question I was hoping to draw out personal details about a stakeholder's interactions with a land trust and learn about emotional attachments to the landscape.

The dominant theme for my questions ended up being about participation, how each stakeholder personally participated in conservation, and how they tried to get others to participate in the process. I wanted to learn about motivations, hesitations, and the assumptions people held about land trust conservation and how that affected their decision to engage in conservation work. There were other questions that related to the organizational process, conservation theory, and management, but fundamentally, how land trusts managed conservation and integrated stakeholders into the process was the driving force behind the questions I asked both internal and external stakeholders.

Interviews were recorded using a hand held recording device. All audio files were then uploaded into iTunes and HyperTranscribe© where I was able to transcribe and edit my interviews. Once transcribed, I used the coding program HyperResearch© to code my transcriptions. My coding scheme was just as important as my methods for data collection. Coding is a way of breaking down data into concepts; and with open coding, a researcher is able to remain open to emergent ideas instead of imposing a preconceived list of categories and themes to the analysis stage. In the process of open coding, I went through my data and found words and phrases that helped conceptualize both the paradigm of the interviewee, and my own labels for themes that arose. (Patton, 2002). Once I completed the process of open coding, I began the process of axial coding, or defining themes among the concepts brought to light. To find themes I used a process called *bridging*, or drawing connections between words and phrases to create categories out of these groupings. I then applied a technique for effectively creating meaningful categories and themes

that can be found with systems thinking theory

(<http://systems.open.ac.uk/materials/T552/>).

Systems Map Technique for Qualitative Analysis

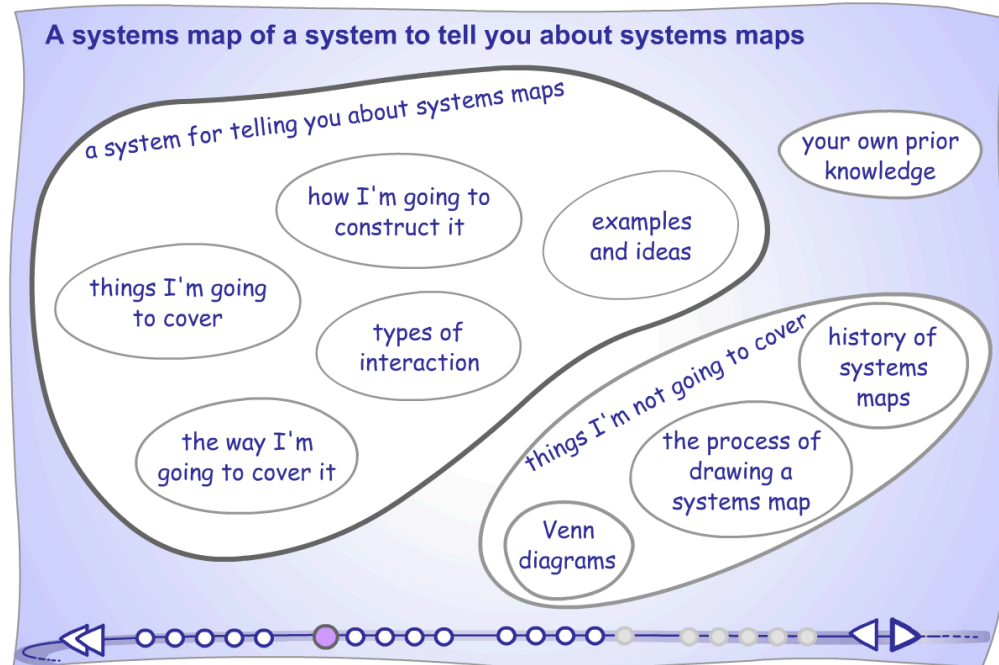


Figure 6: Systems Map Technique for Qualitative Analysis

(<http://systems.open.ac.uk/materials/T552/>)

Mapping analysis allows for a step-by-step breakdown of qualitative data in order to flesh out themes and hidden connections in and between cases studies and topics I brought up in the interview. I used the Systems Map technique to group my open codes into themes. By using this process, I was able to visualize the similarities between codes and how I should set up my analysis so that I could engage groups of ideas instead of separate concepts. I parsed out these concepts that appeared in my transcripts often, such as perpetuity, stewardship, prospecting, and urgency. Some of these words came directly from the transcripts and were used by the interviewees in their answers to my questions, while I created other codes to describe an emotion or

concept discussed in the interview but that did not have a label until the coding process.

With a pad of paper and a pen, I sat down and grouped like words together until I felt that every code was grouped with other ideologically similar codes. After having done this I labeled each category and created the thematic groupings that I would be able to use in my analysis.

Systems Mapping: labeling groups and defining themes

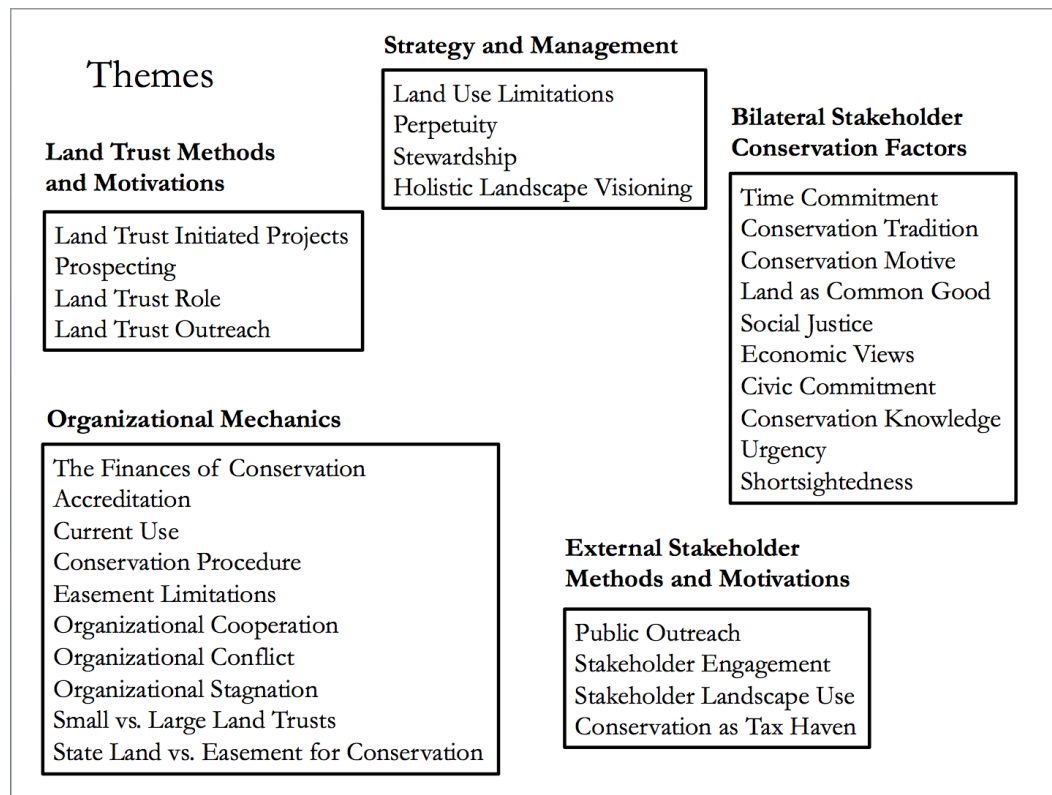


Figure 7: Systems Mapping for Land Trust Conservation in Duxbury, Stowe and the Vermont Land Trusts

Moving codes from one category to another while creating these thematic groups allowed me to think about the meaning of each code. I had to have a reason

to put each code in a particular place, and some codes were eliminated in this process and combined with others due to their similarities in concept and meaning. In order to make sure I was not forcing meaning on the data, I did not put names to my themes until this process was completed. By grouping codes before organizing them thematically, I allowed relationships to appear in an organic manner. Naming themes first would have influenced what codes I thought should go in certain categories instead of finding a name to fit whatever codes ended up together. Once I had implemented this organizational technique I was able to choose quotes from my interviews that would best answer my questions about public participation in the conservation process.

Data collection instruments:

The instruments I used in the collection of my data are derived from the qualitative methods techniques outlined in Michael Quinn Patton's text *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods, 3rd Edition* (2002), Robert K. Yin's text *Case Study Research, 4th Edition* (2009), and Wendell L. French and Cecil H. Bell Jr.'s text *Organization Development, Sixth Edition* (1999). Because the data is qualitative, the tools and techniques I have used are directly related to the efficiency of my interview collection. I applied the techniques of "being a good 'listener,'" "exercising adaptiveness and flexibility," "having a firm grasp of the issues being studied," and "avoiding bias" (Yin, 2009). I also explored the different matrices and flow diagrams to help me organize the data so that I could more efficiently analyze the information I had collected.

Bias and Research Limitations:

In *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods*, by Kindon and Kesby., ethical procedure for participatory research is described as “determining ‘right action’ in light of individual and commonly held values”(Kindon and Kesby, 2007). An easier way to understand this ethical stance is to describe it as judging what is best to do in a certain situation based on commonly understood ethical norm and not on a hybrid ethical norm that might occur within a specific community that I could be studying. In the case of my studies, I used the ethical norms set by the University of Vermont and guided by my own ethical judgment within these outlines. As for my own risk management, I made an effort to not impose my own management and planning inclinations on the stakeholders or other study subjects but the nature of drafting interview questions made it so that no matter what my view on conservation was a variable in the study. I asked questions that I deemed important which means that my responses were influenced by the topics that I chose to talk about.

In the selection of my interview subjects, I could not avoid another degree of bias. I chose my initial subjects based on the snowball method of interview selection and chose my first interviewees because of their involvement with conservations issue. I knew that the data would be rich if I interviewed people who cared about conservation. By choosing the snowball method, I affected my study by inserting my ideas of who would be best to approach in each land trust in order to get quality content in my interview. I then would ask my interviewees that they thought I should interview next within my parameters so that I would be assured of interviewing an individual with some conviction about conservation. This also had an inherent bias

because I was asking my interview subjects to recommend others, and people usually recommend people whom they trust.

The biases in my questions and in my sample selection were biases I was willing to accept knowing that the material in my interviews would be more meaningful for the size of the study I was conducting.

My connections with the Vermont, Duxbury and Stowe Land Trusts were another bias that should be recognized. I am a resident of Waterbury, Vermont and am a trustee for the Lintilhac Foundation, my family's foundation that works in the area of land conservation in Vermont, in addition to clean water, renewable energy, and sustainability issues in the state. My relationship through my work and my place of residence biases my view because I naturally have opinions about the landscape I interact with on a daily basis and where I consider myself a stakeholder. In addition to my locational bias, there is the fact that I would not be studying conservation if I did not already have opinions about what conservation should look like in Vermont.

Chapter 4: Analysis

When I began my study I chose to ask the question of whether or not collaborative stakeholder involvement is a product of a particular conservation approach. I was interested in finding out if the type and frequency of land trust outreach initiatives affected whether or not external stakeholders were more or less involved. To do this I broke my study into sections described earlier as statewide and community land trusts, and subsequently, internal and external stakeholders. For my analysis I will look at the characteristics of each site I chose to study and then delve into the interviews that I collected from the stakeholders of the three land trusts in question.

Site Descriptions:

In the section on methods, I mentioned that I chose the land trusts in my study based on census data for amount of land conserved and annual income. What the census data does not illustrate is the social similarities and differences between these three land trusts that affect the type and involvement of stakeholders in these communities.

The Vermont Land Trust is the largest statewide land trusts in Vermont that only focuses on conservation within Vermont. There are larger land trusts that do work in Vermont such as the Nature Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land, and the Conservation Alliance, but they also do work nationally. The Vermont Land Trusts has regional coordinators throughout the state who serve to create a link

between communities and an overarching governing body. In this way the VLT is working to stay connected with local conservation ideals so that conservation projects are more well received and supported within a community. The VLT's headquarters are in Montpelier, the state's capitol, but VLT works on projects distributed throughout the state, from the northern to southernmost points. In the 2012-2013 fiscal year, the VLT took on 56 different conservation projects, conserving a total of 9,958 acres in all but one county in Vermont. A Map of the location of each conservation initiative for the 2012-2013 fiscal year can be seen in Appendix C (vlt.org). In many ways, the role of the VLT is to serve as a vehicle for conservation in communities that lack their own local land trust. In the case of the VLT's help in the Town of Wells where some of my interview subjects come from, the town had no other option but to approach the VLT for help or create their own land trust. Many communities opt not to create their own land trusts because of the time and money it takes as well as the long-term organizational administration required to run a nonprofit. The VLT also assists small land trusts such as the Duxbury Land Trust when there are not enough funds to move a project ahead.

The Duxbury Land Trusts has no official headquarters and was founded in large part to conserve the swimming hole in Duxbury. The swimming hole project was the first conservation effort taken on by the land trust. Help from the VLT made this and other projects possible for the Duxbury Land Trust, but there is no major effort to fundraise for stewardship endowments or for to grow the annual income to support spontaneous conservation initiatives. Another dynamic that creates a distinct difference between the VLT and the Duxbury Land Trusts is the

number of stakeholders each organization has. As a statewide organization, the VLT has the ability to draw from many communities and take on many different types of conservation projects that create a diverse group of supporters. Just by nature of its size, the VLT engages more people in their conservation projects. The Duxbury Land Trust is small and therefore its ability to engage stakeholders is affected. No new projects means no new stakeholder groups are being reached. In many ways this difference in size was at the heart of my question about stakeholder engagement. I wondered if large land trusts had a harder time reaching stakeholders than small land trusts because of being spread too thin. I will look at this issue later in my thesis, but size for the purpose of describing my sites is a variable in the participation equation and the VLT and Duxbury Land Trusts had distinctively different management techniques due to their dissimilarities in this area.

The Stowe Land Trust has its headquarters in Stowe, Vermont and a small paid staff. Unlike Duxbury, the SLT is able to pay someone to do the difficult administrative work that goes along with conservation law, and so Stowe is able to take on goals such as growing a stewardship endowment and planning ahead for unforeseen projects by keeping the coffers relatively full over the course of many years. Stowe has a long history of conservation dating back to the 1980s and it was clear that the SLT has a far greater rate of involvement in the conservation process than Duxbury. This is an interesting dynamic because Stowe and Duxbury are separated by only one town, Waterbury. The difference in population size, Duxbury's being 1,763 people in 2010, and Stowe's being 4,314 people in 2010, is

notable. With less residents in Duxbury, there are in theory less people to participate in conservation as volunteers (<http://www.census.gov/>).

The Input-Output Flow figure from Koliba et. al. illustrates governance network flows for an organization. For the purpose of my study, I have taken the concepts from Figure 3 and applied them to my study. In Koliba et. al. there are two main input flows/points of analysis, one for the organization and one for external stakeholders. For my study I will integrate stakeholders into the internal organizational analysis and not just the external analysis. I believe that the people who run an organization are also stakeholders in the issue of conservation and so must be analyzed in a similar manner to external stakeholders.

In the table below, I have listed the codes I collected based on their orientation to a particular section of the flow chart described in Figure 3.

Inputs	Process	Outputs
Time commitment	Land Trust Initiated Projects	Land Trust Initiated Projects
Conservation tradition	Prospecting	Land Trust Outreach
Conservation motive	Land Trust Outreach	Stewardship
Land as Common Good	Accreditation	
Social Justice	Current Use	
Economic Views	Conservation Procedure	
Civic Commitment	Organizational Cooperation	
Conservation Knowledge	Organizational Conflict	
Conservation as Tax Haven	Small vs. Large Land Trusts	
The finances of Conservation	Perpetuity	
Easement limitations	Stewardship	
Land Use Limitations	Urgency	
Land Trust Role	Public Outreach	
	Stakeholder Engagement	
	Stakeholder Landscape Use	
	Shortsightedness	
	Holistic Landscape Visioning	

Figure 8: Input Code Categorization

The inputs for this study are defined as any factor in the land trust process that was based on an individual's or organization's values. In selecting codes for this category, I included codes that were very clearly belief oriented, but I also included codes that

outwardly might seem more like a process code but due to the influence of personal opinion, a process code became a value code. Once such code is *The Finances of Conservation*. This code at first seems to describe organizational administration topics, but what I found was that there were subjective nuances to the finances of conservation, such as whether or not it was appropriate to create an endowment for stewardship, how much money is spent on a particular type of project in a particular region, and what kind of fundraising events are instituted at each land trust to name a few. In the following quote, an interviewee describes what certain people believe to be true about how conservation affects the tax base in a Vermont town.

LL: I was talking a little bit ago with somebody from the VLT and they were mentioning trying to present towns with a more formal understanding of tax the tax base give and take that happens with conservation and conservation versus development and whether it's actually going to be detrimental to conserve because a lot of people have that understanding.

Interviewee #3: Absolutely

LL: From your role on the community, did you feel like you came in contact with some of these sentiments in Wells?

Interviewee #3: Oh yeah. There were some outspoken folks that said it's going to raise our taxes, we want nothing to do with it. There weren't that many at the time but you know they were there and when we looked at the numbers that wasn't true. Whether they believed it or not, it wasn't true. We actually added a little bit to the tax base because we had two parcels that are now for sale. Two parcels, two or three but anyway it added slightly to the tax base. It didn't take anything away. And personally inside I went oh phew, thank God, aren't we lucky it worked out this way? I don't know if that's the case everywhere.

This quote is a good example of how a seemingly objective code reflects the subjective topic of how much land is worth, why, and what people are willing to pay for it based on whether they believe conservation is worth it or not. This is a value statement and therefore an input because a stakeholder is influencing the process of conservation with their own beliefs.

In order to differentiate between input and process codes, I asked myself two questions. The first being, what is the motivating factor that gets stakeholders to participate in conservation? The answers to this question went into the Input category. The second question was: what are the methods through which land trusts involve stakeholders in the conservation process and/or stay compliant with nonprofit regulations? The answers to this question went into the process category.

The codes in the process category describe techniques employed by land trusts that are either currently used, or an interviewee believes the techniques mentioned should or shouldn't be used as a way to generate participation and create efficiencies in organizational procedures. The following quote is an example of an interviewee who believes there are other techniques that *should* be used to make sure a land trust is being effective in reaching its constituency.

Interviewee #5: So maybe one of the things that land trusts need to do is figure out if they have a self-review. Are we still relevant? Are we still solving problems or are we only creating problems so that we can continue to exist. And you know I think some of the big ones have had some of these growing pains probably that's filtering out the smaller ones.

LL: Reassessing strategic plans.

Interviewee #5: Yeah. Do you really need us anymore? That's a very difficult thing for an individual to believe. Self-reflection is hard to ask yourself -- geez am I still doing what I want to do? -- probably the hardest question anyone can ask. It's even harder as an organization because the answer is in your soul. I mean the answer is in the soul of the organization.

This quote was categorized under the heading of *Conservation Procedure* because it describes a process through which stakeholders can become more engaged in conservation. The code was subsequently listed as a Process code.

Outputs are often limited to easements, increased access to public land, and fundraising events. In the case of my study, however, I did not have codes describing specific deliverables from a land trust as that was not within the scope of the

transcriptions I was working with. I did have codes that described outputs on a larger theoretical scale such as Land Trust Initiated Projects, Land Trust Outreach, and Stewardship. I will refer to these outputs as cross-framework codes because these three codes also fell into the Process category. These are *Processes* because they lead to better engagement from internal and external stakeholders, which in turn makes for better organizational development and mission realization. But they are also *Outputs* because they include goods and services provided by a land trust to its clientele. Stewardship is an *output* because it is a service that is provided by the land trust at the culmination of a conservation project and refers to the *process* of a land trust employee or volunteer making sure that the easement regulations are being followed. *Land Trust Initiated Projects* are *outputs* because they are created by a land trust and provide the commodity of conserved land to a community, but they are *processes* because they are the vehicle for the generation of greater community support and engagement. The more a land trust succeeds in conserving land in a way that is supported by the community, the more likely a community will support and be engaged in future conservation initiatives. Land Trust Outreach is an *output* because when a land trust has been effective, they have generated financial support for their initiatives, which means that they can afford to host more events, and the act of engaging stakeholders in events to generate support for conservation is a *process*.

Outcomes are “goals and purposes” as described by Koliba et. al. This category changes for each land trust and for each individual stakeholder, whether internal or external. It is the ambiguous nature of the outcomes that makes conservation so

difficult. If people were able to agree on what they wanted from their shared landscape, there would be no need for an organization to do this work. There is bound to be conflict and disagreement over this issue and so the outcomes are unpredictable and subjective. It is in this last step of the Input-Output framework that positive and negative feedback loops can be identified. The effects of the first three categories are realized in the fourth and it becomes clear that there is an inability to set “network-wide goals” therefore making strategic planning and holistic landscape visioning difficult. The Input-Output framework is meant to map the flow of resources through an organization, and in the case of my study, it is a way to investigate where and how in the conservation process for land trusts methods and goals either influence stakeholder involvement adversely or constructively. When used in tandem with my thematic breakdown of the codes in my study, I am able to discern what specific codes/variable distinctly influence the Input-Output flow.

While I have broken down my open codes into five themes, the principal factor that emerged from all the codes and themes listed is *management by crisis*. In both my interviews with internal and external stakeholders, it became clear that *management by crisis* dictated many of the conservation initiatives taken up by the three land trusts that I studied. This factor affects everything from perpetuity to social justice issues and implies a shortsighted approach to organizational development and strategic planning. The figure below illustrates the negative feedback loop within the conservation network of the three land trusts in question. This figure is a generalization, and there are unique qualities to the negative feedback loops for each specific land trust. Nevertheless, this figure is applicable to all three.

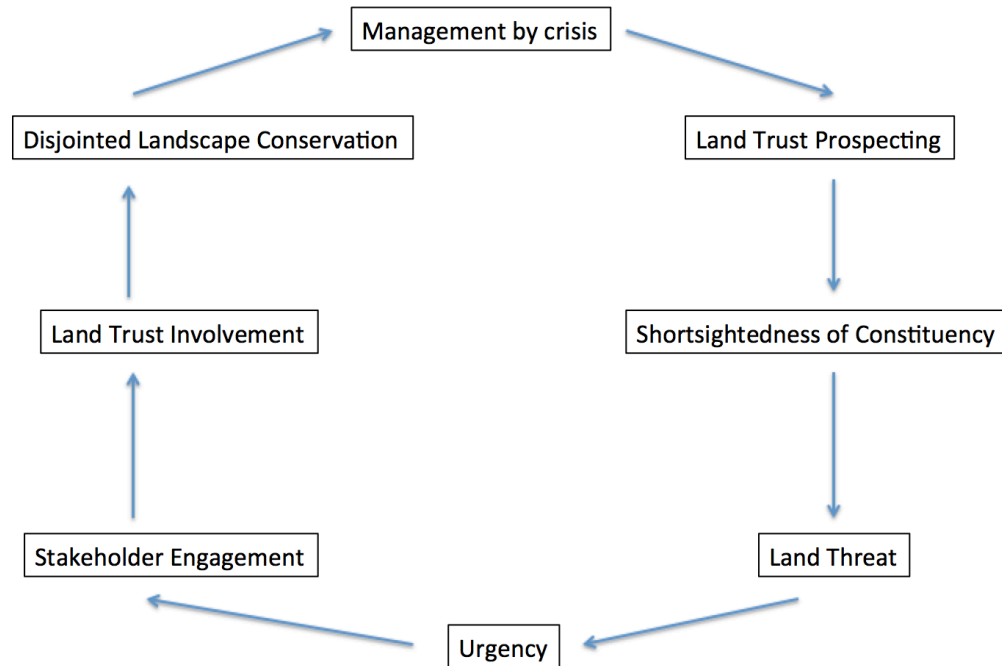


Figure 9: Negative Conservation Feedback Loop

In this figure, I have intermingled Process codes from my analysis with my own terms for the various steps within this negative feedback loop. The flow within this system makes it clear that the cycle of urgency perpetuates itself and is fueled by a deficit of “unexpected land availability.” To better illustrate how this negative feedback loop functions, I will describe each theme and key process codes that affect this loop and how they are connected to the current Input-Output flow and what it would take for strategic conservation planning.

EMERGENT THEMES

The first theme I will discuss is “Land Trust Methods and Motivations.” All codes listed in the thematic category of “Land Trust Methods and Motivations” are,

Land Trust Initiated Projects

Prospecting

Land Trust Role

Land Trust Outreach

These are all important components, but within this theme, one code in particular is of primary importance when discussing the subject of management by crisis. This code, also a point of social closure, is the idea of *prospecting*. Prospecting is when land trusts search out parcels of land as part of a strategic planning initiative for the landscape. The act of prospecting could be considered “leading” which is something that nonprofits try to avoid because they in theory answer to their constituency, they do not develop their own conservation goals apart from stakeholder participation.

The topic of “leading” was discussed in many interviews in addition to techniques used to try and circumvent the issue.

Interviewee #1: “So, I think where we have landed recently is we have done the obvious prospecting so there are places that we know of through our experience, swimming holes or trails or something that we should be prospecting, ... but for the most part our prospecting as such is more like relationship building. ...there are lots of things that are like this in life I am sure which you want to get picked but you can't put yourself right in front of the person, you know you have to just kind of be there sidling around, inconspicuous, not making a pain of yourself, and then when somebody needs help, you say ‘oh, we can help with that’ So that is the way prospecting for a community project usually works”

In a following quote this same interviewee elaborated when I asked a question about the Vermont Land Trust's choice of initiatives and how they go about choosing one project over another.

Interviewee #1: "That's the problem with all planning and all visions isn't it? You know that sort of leading the horse to the water thing. ... Say you developed an unbelievable plan for a state wide network of mountain biking things that involved people from coming out of state and they stayed for 10 days and move around the state and do these different rides and whatnot and people might get really pumped about it or people might feel very threatened by it. And so it's really difficult you know, how to help a vision like that, it's tricky because as soon as people feel like they're... being forced into something or talked into something, or cajoled into something, they get defensive, you know? As do we all, right? As soon as you realize someone's a telemarketer, you're like "what do you want! You know?"

As illustrated in the quote above, one thing that became apparent in the interviews and in the research was that strategic planning is often seen as an aggravation for communities who do not want to make hard and fast decisions about their economic futures. This limitation for land trusts was reiterated by another internal stakeholder:

Interviewee #2; "I think the biggest thing that influences how a land trust approaches this is that it's entirely up to the landowner. We're working on voluntary conservation so we will never do a project until a landowner is ready, whether it's for sale or they come to us, or someone dies and the family comes to us. It's always up to their time line. That doesn't mean that we don't do proactive outreach in the meantime. One of the ways that we do this is that we have a conservation plan that identifies ... a lot of the properties that we think that the town has identified as important conservation values, some of what is done is at the board and committee level to identify those and kind of represents that town's interest."

This quote shows just how influential external stakeholders are in the conservation process. This same interviewee goes on to explain more about the idea of prospecting for their land trust and the control stakeholder engagement has on this process.

Interviewee #2: We find we don't have to do a ton of proactive outreach, other than to let landowners know that they have important land to us and generally those people know who they are. We can't handle a ton of land protection projects coming up in a year because we're so small so we find the more proactive we are could be a hamstring for us because we wouldn't be able to address everything.

There is a notion expressed by both interviewees about how important it is that stakeholders dictate what land they do and don't want to conserve. One interviewee interprets this current relationship between stakeholders and land trusts as "opportunistic."

Interviewee #7: And I think the land trusts in particular are opportunistic. They wait for people to come to them and say I have a piece of land can you help me, or they are driven by public emergency. Oh this piece of land came up, so and so died, and it's going to be subdivided and we have to do this and that's where participation really is important but it's behind, it's a lagging approach. It's not really constructive...."

This interviewee also explains their belief that ad hoc conservation techniques from a land trust affect a stakeholder's understanding of what is important to conserve.

Interviewee #7: I think smaller land trusts are very responsive to the community, they have to be. And you'll have landowners say we want to conserve 30 acres and we help them and we get an easement. Vermont Land Trust should really acknowledge its role in conservation. It really doesn't. I think it acknowledges its role in the working landscape but doesn't see that you can shift people's perceptions to say "by the way did you realize you have the last remaining population of X or your land is a really important corridor for Y."

Impromptu conservation is a result of land trust prospecting culture. On the one hand, land trusts do not want to "lead" stakeholders, but on the other, organizing stakeholder in an effective manner to promote engagement and decision-making in the conservation process can be difficult without a little organizational suggestion. Land Trust Outreach, Land Trust Initiated Projects, and Land Trust Role are all linked to the idea of prospecting because a land trust's ethos of when and how to engage people in the conservation process reverberates through these codes.

Interviewee #11: At least since I have been there we haven't done that... promoted ourselves, say a booth at town meeting...I do know when we were doing the town plan we set up a booth at town meeting, we said this is what we're doing and we asked for feedback. We had information night so we broke it into energy policy and you know development and I forget what the other, the other was agriculture uses and something else but we had two nights, we invited the community and said this is our agenda. This is what we're like, what do

you want to hear, and just sort of brainstormed. Unfortunately not a lot of people showed up but you know we advertised and tried our best. So I think that would be good for the land trust to do.

In this quote about Duxbury Land Trust outreach techniques, it is evident that there are issues with how the land trust is attempting to communicate with the community for the purpose of increasing stakeholder engagement in conservation projects. They tried to have an open forum/information night, but participation was low, and Interviewee #11 mentions that the DLT has not had the capacity to organize a gathering that could potentially be more engaging for the community. This relates to prospecting because land trusts often take measures to avoid “leading,” and engage stakeholders, but the effectiveness of these techniques is not predictable. In that same vein, Land Trust Initiated Projects such as one Interviewee mentions, the State Farm project in Duxbury, can be very beneficial to a community in theory, but if the community is not in support of the initiative it can stagnate. Land Trust Methods and Motivations became a theme because I needed to have a category that encompassed codes that referenced how engaged an organization was with its constituency and not just how engaged stakeholders are with their local NGOs. A land trust is beholden to its constituency when making conservation decisions, but without proper outreach, a land trust can fall into a pattern of conserving first and asking questions later.

The second dominant theme that appeared during the coding process is the theme entitled “Bilateral Stakeholder Conservation Factors.” The term “bilateral” refers to the fact that the codes within this theme reference the views of both internal and external stakeholders. The codes that make up “Bilateral Stakeholder

Conservation Factors” are:

Conservation Tradition, Conservation Motive, Land as Common Good, Social Justice

Time Commitment, Civic Commitment, Economic Views, Conservation Knowledge Urgency, Shortsightedness

This theme is the counterpart to “Land Trust Methods and Motivations” in that it focuses specifically on stakeholder motivations. There are both inputs (values) and processes that speak to the relationship stakeholders have with the conservation process. In this theme I wanted to capture why people choose to conserve or not conserve and what ideals play into that decisions making process. For this thematic category I will begin my analysis with the code “Urgency.” This code is important because it in many ways is the ideological foundation for all of the other codes in this theme.

In the context of my study, urgency is what individual stakeholders feel as a motivator for conservation when a part of the landscape they love is threatened in the short term. In many of the interviews, there is not one factor that is involved with urgency. The fear of development is noted by a number of interviewees, but urgency remains for most interviewees an abstract idea that describes a sense of impending loss. Interviewee # 3 talks about this anxiety over the idea of degraded natural resources.

Interviewee #3: “I think that's the key to conservation when people understand what they have to lose. They may not understand what they have now. But if you can show them a picture of the examples of what can happen you know you pave paradise and put up a parking lot... you know that old song?

From the point of view of Interviewee #3, there is the mental reference to a popular

song that is influencing their fear of a hypothetical threat. In a more specific instance, Interviewee #7 describes a specific concern about the future of a parcel of land.

Interviewee #7: [Y]ou're driving up route 100 towards Stowe and there's one spot that is forest to forest on both sides and that spot is something about 100 feet 200 feet is really critical as corridor otherwise you have to go all the way up and around. And the Vermont forest guys have identified this as super critical. And it's for sale. And I don't think anyone's thinking about and worrying about it like I do... {Laughing} when I see these things because it's not in their radar screen.

This is a more specific instance of a fear about the loss of habitat, but this interviewee goes on to explain why they think other people are not as interested in conserving this piece of land as they are.

Interviewee #7: "They see a wall of undeveloped land. Most people, they see a forest like everywhere else... And I think it has to do with people shifting baselines and not realizing what is lost. Not realizing what's lost or even threatened even when it's gone."

In this quote, Interviewee #7 touches on the idea that what causes a sense of urgency is different for each stakeholder. Each stakeholder has a personal relationship with the landscape and as Interviewee #4 alludes to, the motivation to become active in conservation work often is prompted by a NIMBY, or *Not In My Back Yard*, response.

Interviewee #4: "I mean sometimes it takes a threat... like a threat of something bad to trigger that NIMBY response, before people said ok, let's try to preserve it. Preserve something. If it's not threatened, I don't think people feel the urgency."

It is interesting to see these two quotes juxtaposed. Interviewee #7 believes that people become normalized to an aesthetic and therefore don't think about conservation until that aesthetic is disrupted in a major way. Interviewee #4 believes that it is the threat of major disruption that triggers a NIMBY response. The focus on urgency with the interviewees in this study was less on specific uses that created a sense of urgency but rather why these perceived negative changes on the landscape

make people fear for its future enough to take action. Once the loss of land becomes personal, people get interested in preservation. As Interviewee #7 explains, environmental degradation can be occurring all the time but it is not until it affects an individual or community's back yard that there is an increased interest in conservation

The topic of crisis management as an outcome of this sense of urgency came up in an interview with a Duxbury Land Trust stakeholder.

Interviewee #5: "That's what drives the agenda, because we go from crisis to crisis...If you are on a land trust board or you're making land trust decisions, essentially what you're doing is crisis management, that's really all it is, and most people who are on these boards...I don't know if Stowe now at this point (is) able to hire professionals. I think that they might be."

L.L.: "They have three employees."

Interviewee #5: "Ok. ... Duxbury Land Trust would kill to have a part-time...for many of these organizations they're going crisis to crisis and they're really not equipped. They have no skills. The people who run them they have absolutely no idea. They haven't done anything other than being good Samaritans really. And so they're professionally ineffectual people trying to fight very professionally competent people...Crisis after crisis after crisis after crisis and so the things that result become these very patch worked without any thematic... there's been no common goal, other than to solve the immediate problem, if at all possible to address the immediate crisis.]

Well one of the things that strikes me as problematic is that is because land trusts are crisis oriented then, I don't know how to exactly say this but the players, the conversation really almost always revolves around the crisis need to preserve something or to conserve something if something is threatened. And so if you look at the suite of players, whether it's community wide or statewide or country wide it doesn't really matter, there are the people who are motivated by that, by those arguments. I would say that they are ... generally speaking a minority especially motivated enough to put in either tangible resources or time. I don't know... pick your percent. Maybe you could even get up to 20% of the relevant group but that would be great. And you have the same number of people who are fervently on the other side and again possibly let's say 20% so that would be 60% of the people in the middle probably not terribly motivated by either argument because there's other things going on in their lives."

In this quote, the interviewee explains that management by crisis has many downsides besides the obvious lack of planning. He believes that the person motivated by urgency is not necessarily trained in conservation and therefore is not

as adept at understanding the networks and organizational details of an easement's implementation and future ramifications on the landscape. Community land trusts in Vermont do not have much of a budget and so they are beholden to people with strong convictions who may not see the holistic vision for a shared landscape. A lack of Conservation Knowledge is a barrier to making sure that an organization is functioning efficiently and completing conservation easement properly and timely.

One Interviewee mentions,

Interviewee #13: "I think it is a barrier (an understanding of conservation) and it's hard, so its again its finding someone that has enough interest that they're going to go either take a class or read, go through the whole thing and understand it really well so they can answer questions.

Another community land trust stakeholder comments on the level of understanding of the conservation process and how it can be difficult to find both passionate and informed volunteers in an already diminished pool of civic do-gooders.

Interviewee #5: "And so the fact that those people who are engaged have a limited formal understanding of that stuff (conservation law and process) have to educate themselves about it ...we had to hire lawyers, we had to hire legal people. There's somebody serving... I don't know if they're still serving on the land trust board or they're just available but, they are a lawyer and they offer some level of advice but in order for it to be professional, you still have to engage them. I mean they count for opinions but for them to actually put their legal stamp on something, it takes time. You have to pay them something. So all of that basically deteriorates and that is just a couple of things we can talk about a dozen others that reduce that efficacy so if you have a small amount of time and impact and it has been reduced to the point where that small amount is only 50% effective, it's essentially like tying your hand behind your back.

People burn out on spending their free time volunteering for their communities, and in small communities, there are only so many people to rotate through before everyone who has had an interest in conservation and the free time to volunteer has been exhausted. Interviewee #7 talks about the issue of personnel resource fatigue.

Interviewee #7: "Yeah, that's a huge bottleneck and what I see also happening in parallel

with that is you have this small pool of civic do-gooders like we are. There's just so many people like us to go around so I ended up being on the planning committee and the land trust and the boards of two of these communities. I was studying and working full time and being a mom and doing my dissertation all at the same time. And there are a lot of people like that and so people don't have time to do this properly. They're all volunteers yet they're doing professional jobs. Other states and towns have paid employees where they write grants to do this. We had to write Waterbury's town energy plan for the town plan because they didn't have money to do it. And it's crazy. It took us about a week of solid time, volunteer time and I can't afford to do that. So I think the other issue is you have people who burn out quickly in this field because there's just so much you can do and there's so little time and secondly you have a very small pool of potential, talented volunteers who really can make change."

Interviewee #7 brings up the point that having free time is a crucial part of making sure that volunteer organizations are able to survive in small towns. Because conservation work can be laborious, this affects the willingness of volunteers to participate in conservation related matters. One Interviewee describes a certain apathy towards conservation in the following quote,

LL: "Is there anything in particular that you're passionate about with conservation that I didn't ask you about, that you'd like to talk about?"

Interviewee #4: "Anything about conservation that I'm passionate about? I don't think so. I mean I think if I'm passionate about...I mean my views have probably changed over the years. I mean certainly when I was in college I thought we could, it was going to be so easy to, environmentally, get everything straightened out. It just seemed like so obvious how to do it. But we didn't do it. And so I definitely have a harder time being a really, I think I'm just so much more realistic now. You know someone might say well. I think it's being realistic. I don't think it's being... I mean I still try to be upbeat. And I think my biggest thing now is just, is not so much the conservation. Like I sometimes think that I should be done with the... land trust board because I don't think about conserving land."

Interviewee #4 mentions a waning interest in conservation due to the time it takes to affect change and how your personal views on environmental issues can change during that time. When public servants are asked to volunteer time and time again, they lose interest and motivation. Interviewee #5 reiterates this issue of the time and energy required to be civically engaged.

Interviewee #5: "So I think that's where we are in land trusts. They are often citizen-based

and volunteer-based and poorly funded, and they are almost always reacting to a well-funded alternative and so they're victims of that constant eclectic (gamut of work)... know they're doing three things because they're threatened by three things but there is no theme, because by the time they get those three things done and it's time to think about a theme, there are six other things to do.”

In the quote above, *Time Commitment* plays a key role in the conservation process for this land trust. Interviewee #5 believes that conservation is occurring in a piece meal fashion because of their desire to be more comprehensive with planning, but the tools with which to achieve this are simply not available.

Conservation Tradition, Conservation Motive, Social Justice, and Economic Views are all reflected in the following quote from an interviewee who is discussing how stakeholders choose what they value most for conservation.

Interviewee #6: “As far as conservation’s perspective for exclusively for wildlife habitat, for example, you know there's kind of this spectrum of value. You can come down on the spectrum in a lot of different places in trying to decide how much land we need to conserve to protect wildlife, Is a really tricky and impossible question to answer because you know what wildlife do you want to protect?...How much land do we need to set aside for our wildlife or for our children, for whatever reason? There are scenic values, you know, there are all kinds of reasons to do conservation, agriculture. So getting at that question is real tricky. And I think you know we've toyed with the idea of having community conversations and done that a little bit where we have had these large focus groups where people you know have a big map and try to map all of the communities’ values and where their most important land is and take it from there.”

Interviewee #6 explains that while land trusts and communities might want to provide access for a variety of people to a variety of land uses, the more complex usage gets, the harder it is to maintain the a sustainable foundation of conservation on a piece of land.

The following quote highlights the conundrum of a land trust needing to plan ahead and plan for multiple uses for a landscape, but having to deal with stakeholders who want to have their cake and eat it too, as the saying goes.

Stakeholders want to have access to a landscape and use it as they see fit, but they get upset if those uses differ from what they see as suitable.

Interviewee #6: “So you have the community values and some wildlife values and then ag. values and once you start to overlay all that and that becomes all locked up and that scares people. So politically that's really kind of unpalatable, so it's a really tricky conservation to have. But I think it's an important one because you know just like development conservation happens kind of incrementally.”

This incremental conservation does not mean planned conservation. What

Interviewee #6 is referring to is the propensity of stakeholders to move from one last minute conservation decision to another based on a sense of urgency because they are unwilling to compromise on land uses with multiple stakeholder groups that might challenge their idea of what a conservation easement should entail in terms of access and development.

I refer to this lack of forward thinking and the inability for stakeholders to make concessions when it comes to conservation as *shortsightedness*. In the thematic category of “Bilateral Stakeholder Conservation Factors” shortsightedness is a deficit and point of closure that fuels and perpetuates the negative feedback loop in figure 6. While the absence of forward thinking does not always have to have a negative connotation, shortsightedness seemed appropriate as a code because of the limitations that came to light through the interviews about how planning should occur and what management goals are appropriate for a land trust.

Shortsightedness takes many forms. A stakeholder can be shortsighted when it comes to planning for future conservation efforts, opting to only engage when conservation projects are urgent and time sensitive. Shortsightedness can also manifest itself in the form of a “NIMBY” attitude when stakeholders understand the pressing needs for certain environmental justice and economic goals but do not want

them infringing on a landscape aesthetic they have grown to love. From the point of view of one external stakeholder interviewee it was clear that there was an internal conflict between knowing that there needs to be a balance between the economic, environmental, and social health of a community, and not liking the looks of some sustainable industries that people are pushing for in Vermont and in this person's community. This interviewee exhibited a shortsightedness with their belief that a landscape should benefit a community holistically but just not in ways they disapprove.

Interviewee #3: "Ok, I think you've struck a good cord because of the poverty in this state. Development is welcomed as an economic opportunity, or the development we're forced to have, the cellphone towers to keep our education systems current. I don't want to say education but to keep the tourists happy. And then we feed off of that, you know, but tourism is what, a third of our state revenue? It's big; we have to keep these folks happy and coming here.

So it's a really fine balance. I don't, can't tell you I have any wisdom except that there's got to be a middle road. ... Where there is ... like zoning only it would be: - here is where we're going to keep our industry, - here is where we're going to keep our natural beauty, - here is where is where we're going to have agriculture. So there's got to be an allotment for the development. Because we can't stick our heads in the sand. It would hurt us in the end, you know, but there's also got to be an allotment for the health that does thrive here. And I guess the values of compromise and compassion go along with the conservation, you know?"

In this quote it is clear that the interviewee sees that there is a "fine balance," but in a following quote goes on to say:

Interviewee #3: "So I think it's a combination of just that basic recognition of when the land is intact and healthy. You know that beyond primordial awareness I guess. I don't want to get it too jacked up but it's just something intrinsic that we know. We know what nourishes us, you know, and then it was cultivated by generations of people. Who's kept it alive here you know and so I really dislike seeing the cell towers go up. I dislike the wind, I'm sorry I'm not a fan of wind. I am not a fan of wind because of the environmental impact. And I know it's more efficient than solar but you know how many birds are we going to wipe out you know?"

In this statement, it is evident that while this individual knows that there needs to be

a culture of acceptance and collaboration, she is only willing to allow for a landscape future that fits within their personal paradigm. While there might be an element of pragmatism inherent in taking on projects as they come and rallying stakeholders through a sense of urgency, ultimately there will always be a limitation to forward thinking with this method. Shortsightedness might work for stakeholders on a daily basis, but the objective of this code was to highlight examples where interviewees were simply limiting their view of conservation to their present situation and current beliefs without the mention of holistic conservation planning in the long-term.

In the following quote, Interviewee #6 brings up the issue of “locked up” land and how that can affect people’s desire to strategize about a landscape in a holistic and forward thinking manner. Ultimately people are caught in a Catch 22 cycle where they want to keep all of their options open for fear that putting an easement on a piece of land might limit its profitability or enjoyment in the future. Not conserving the land in a strategic way, however, will sadly prevent the greatest number of constituents from benefiting from the landscape. This is the heart of Odum’s quote mentioned in chapter 1 and the crux of the process of management by crisis.

The third thematic category I will discuss is “External Stakeholder Methods and Motivations,” and is comprised of the following four open codes,

Public Outreach

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder Landscape Use

Conservation as Tax Haven

I chose to name this thematic category “External Stakeholder Methods and Motivations” because I wanted to create a category for gauging participation for stakeholders not officially affiliated with a land trust. This was important because I had already created the category of “Land Trust Methods and Motivations” that speaks to internal stakeholder participation techniques and incentives. I needed to be able to contrast this category with a theme that speaks directly to the stakeholders who did not hold official land trust roles such as employees or B.O.D. members. Each of the codes in this theme describes the relationship community members have with their local conserved land and how they decide to engage themselves.

I will begin my analysis of this theme with the open code, *Stakeholder Engagement*. The efficacy of a nonprofit such as a land trust relies on the willingness of a stakeholder to be civically engaged. Without sufficient input from external stakeholders, land trusts are left to perpetuate the current state of the landscape without fully understanding if doing this is sustainable for the community in the future.

Interviewee #7: “I think land trusts are so successful because people don't want to view change in the landscape. People like this consistency, they want to drive by this view of the valley and the field just so, and they build layer upon layer and they drive by every day.”

This leads to a system in conservation that is not dynamic and without flexibility to evolve with surrounding communities and their changing needs. There are land trusts that attempt to close this gap in communication between the community and the internal stakeholders. In one interview the planning process for a land trust was explained to me.

Interviewee #2: “Members of the community will contact us to let us know what's important to them so we really do try to balance out what we think are important conservation values and priorities with what the community has communicated to us ... Cady Hill Forest, for example, was one that we got a lot of interest from the community. This was an important project even though it had such a high price tag. So we have a conservation plan, we have proactive outreach at certain times; I mean part of that depends on like we didn't do any proactive outreach when we were doing Cady Hill Forest because we were so busy with that, but that also, it gets people thinking about land conservation. We got a ton of calls from people suddenly interested in having someone come out and take a look at their land because they were seeing it so much (conservation happening around them) It's as if you're doing promotion for land protection when you're doing a high profile project without even meaning to.”

The interviewee describes this process as very passive for a land trust. Projects beget projects and the conservation wheel keeps on turning. This interviewee goes on to infer that this take on planning is in part due to the fact that land trusts can easily be overwhelmed by projects and having too much strategic planning might hinder a land trust's ability to react to popular demand in a timely fashion.

Interviewee #2: “We can't handle a ton of land protection projects coming up in a year because we're so small so the more proactive we are could be a hamstring for us because we wouldn't be able to address everything.”

This illustrates how, despite the intentions of a land trust to plan ahead, their hands are ultimately tied by the community's level of engagement. As with the conservation initiative mentioned in the previous quote, people gravitate towards supporting projects that are both visible and in line with status quo landscape values. In the case of the project mentioned above, there was a great deal of public outreach that helped make it happen. The plan was to allow for a type of landscape use that was relatively groundbreaking for conservation in Vermont, and focused on conserving land for recreational uses such as mountain biking, hiking, trail running, and snowshoeing. Traditionally, agriculture, forestry, wildlife preservation, and viewshed preservation are the primary goals of a land trust easement. The initiative Interviewee #2 mentions has those traditional components, but pushes the boundaries of what a

conservation initiative should encompass with the recreational aspects included in the easement. The project illustrates a slow evolution in what it means to conserve a piece of land, and it was made possible because there was a greater degree of public support and involvement. What people want from the landscape is constantly changing and so land trust easements must change to match the needs of the community. If stakeholders are not engaged until they are filled with a sense of urgency, however, this sort of forward thinking and evolving landscape planning is impossible. Interviewee # 2 goes on to explain that:

“Cady Hill Forest came at a really sensitive time for VHCB because Hurricane Irene had just happened. There was a lot of pressure to divert that money to restoration efforts to help people get back from the hurricane, to help towns recover from the hurricane, the damage that was sustained. We made the case that Cady Hill Forest was a critical component of recreation and tourism in Central Vermont and that by funding that conservation they were solidifying recreation as a sustainable boost for the local economy and Waterbury was involved in that. You know Waterbury was really heavily damaged and we appeared before the select board and said you know we think this would be a really important thing for the community. We're going to work on the Vermont Ride Center (a mountain biking program) concept at the same time that this land conservation deal is happening and we are protecting a system of trails that is going to contribute to the local economy. We're also protecting wildlife habitat and we're protecting a community resource just for people to recreate in town. Timber management will happen so the town will be able to pay for management of this property with revenues from the land. This was really where land conservation, making a substantial contribution to the town, kind of galvanized itself. We've been working towards it for many years but this is where it's really come together. VHCB even said after, we were really nervous we weren't going to get the money because of the pressures to divert it to other needs and we worked really hard to make this case and we still weren't sure we were going to get the money and Heather walked out of that meeting feeling great because everyone said this is the type of land conservation we should be paying for. This is what it means. This is what land conservation is and Cady Hill Forest embodied that for them and it's a really exciting thing to see and it's still doing that. I mean it's got a parking lot, it's got trails, it's got a Facebook page, it's got a huge following.”

L.L.: “A fairly comprehensive map.”

Interviewee #2: “A fairly comprehensive map, a management plan in the process, a master recreation plan being worked on. I mean it's really exciting to see how well land conservation can work sometimes. You know it's only as good as the effort you put into it and I think the community's reception of the project really made that successful where it could have just been a perfunctory, you know ok we did the acquisition, we got the closing behind us, add it to our list of conserved lands. It's a very three dimensional, a very live project for us and it's really exciting to see it keep its legs even after you know our active role has been

[relinquished]. Yeah, it's really an exciting thing to see because we do have to work on that perception that we don't, you know that the idea is that land conservation locks up land and it's a misconception that we're fighting all the time.”

The Cady Hill Forest project is uncommon. The community was able to look to the future and understand what they wanted from their landscape. They proactively planned for uses that they wanted and made allowances for multiple uses of the land. Cady Hill achieves a level of strategic planning that many other conservation projects lack because of the negative feedback loop of management by crisis. Another stakeholder for the town of Stowe explained to me that this proactive planning was not always present in the community.

Interviewee #8: “[P]eople didn't see the risk. You know? People just didn't see why I was pushing that (conservation) so hard. Cause you know, my God, that's just mountains. Whatever's going to happen to them? Nothing will ever happen to them. And then through the 80's development really began to come to Stowe and things began to happen and there be more public support.

In the quote above, Interviewee #8 believes that people choose to ignore the fact that resource availability can change until development becomes an issue. Once again, the ideas of *Urgency* and *Shortsightedness* become the motivating factors for *Stakeholder Engagement*. Interviewee #9 reiterates this belief in describing their own personal relationship with the landscape and with conservation. They admit to only worrying about conservation when a valued piece of land is threatened by development.

Interviewee #9: “Somewhere in the back of your mind, [you're] just like someday something is gonna change, things never stay the same but, for now it's kinda, it is what it is. I just always thought it was a great piece of land, so, that's about it, you know, you don't think about it, you don't think about it until it happens. You don't really plan ahead. We had no real plans, like when she (the property owner) died, a couple of months later when it came on the market, I was like "OH NO!" hehehehe. Might have behooved us a little bit more to actually ask earlier, but we did ask the estate lawyer right a way just to have a way to walk to the lake and because it was all tied up they didn't want to get involved doing that stuff and...”

In this particular situation, the community involved with this initiative was lucky to be able to conserve the piece of land in question before a developer could purchase it, but this could have had a very different outcome for the community based on the lack of involvement.

Conservation as Tax Haven addresses the subject of stakeholders valuing conservation only for its money saving benefits. When looking into “External Stakeholder Methods and Motivations,” it is important to address this code because it is a good example of negative engagement. There are some forms of stakeholder engagement that are the result of holistic thinking and good will, but there are other forms of engagement that indicate self-serving motivations. Because there are tax breaks and other benefits associated with conservation in Vermont, the idea that conservation is a cheap way to keep taxes low can pervade. The following quote references a land trust’s approach to working with landowners who might be using conservation primarily as a money saving tool.

Interviewee #1: It is a substantial amount of the equity, you know (that a land trust invests in a conservation project) and so I think that a lot of hand wringing has been done (by the land trust) over the years about, what if they (the landowners) blow that dough on a vacation? What if they just blow the money and then it's gone, so there is a substantial amount of hand wringing about it, should we be controlling more what people do with this money, should we be giving it out over time, or should we? And we always kind of come back to, we are all adults, it is a business decision, and we do everything we can to make sure they get financial planning and have an accountant and address their debt and address their infrastructure, address their next generation, address their environment, address those really important things, or they take a vacation (laugh), but I am not saying it has always worked out that way, there are people who have sold their development rights, blow the money on a new truck and a few other things and then have kind of woken up to the fact that they can't do it again, so there is this piece which makes me nervous when I am doing these jobs, "are you sure you understand what you are doing?" "Let me try to talk you out of it again" and so I do spend, you know, my MO is to try to talk them out of it several times and if I feel like they really understand the down side of it and they still want to go through with it, then we go ahead and do it.

Land Trusts and their employees go to great lengths to prevent the

prevalence of the *Conservation as Tax Haven* mentality. As illustrated in the following quote, if saving money is the ultimate goal for a stakeholder it can be hard for land trusts and their employees to make sure the easement is being upheld because the new landowner is not as interested in the stewardship of the land.

Interviewee #13: “A woman gave us an easement on her property before she sold it to conserve... it's a nice old farmhouse and a barn...I think its thirteen acres open in front, like a meadow, an open meadow...So she has the easement basically to protect that kind of setting and she didn't want any further development, no further subdivision of her parcel. No building, blah, blah, blah...its unfortunate because the people that bought it (from the woman) don't like us so I don't go on the property but I can see everything I need to see from the road. So I can document from the road that it's maintained to be opened.”

Interviewee #13 expresses the difficulties of stewarding a piece of land when the owners do not have a good relationship with the land trust. When Interviewee #13 states, “Ya maybe they thought they were getting a deal,” it is clear that whatever the reason for the poor communication between the land owner and the land trust, having stakeholders choose to participate in conservation for the benefit of the community and its future generations makes the process more viable than if people choose to participate for self serving purposes. This idea that the landscape exists for personal gains can be seen in another code, *Stakeholder Landscape Use*. This code describes the manifestations of a stakeholder's beliefs about and needs for the land and includes both internal and external stakeholders.

The perceived needs a stakeholder has can be for any and all uses on a landscape such as recreation, food production, housing etc. As Interviewee #4 states, “well, I love to hike so the mountains in Vermont are very dear to my heart or anywhere in New England actually, Maine, New Hampshire and I am concerned that land is getting developed.” Interviewee #11 reiterates the role of personal values in the following quote.

Interviewee #11: “Well I came to Vermont to go to college and fell in love and never left so that was in 1989 and I think at that point in time I was introduced to backpacking, hiking, camping really didn't do anything like that prior to that. That led to skiing, mountain biking and just being out and about. I feel like for me personally, not so much even the exercise, it's just being in nature is just good for my soul. I need to do it, I need to be outside. You know I have a seven and a six year old boy right now just walking in the woods with them you know right now is the same as running ten miles five or six years ago. It seems to do the same thing for me and it's great to see them be really into it.”

Different people choose to interact with their environments in different manners, and it is this love of their natural surroundings that has fostered a desire to work on conservation matters for the two interviewees listed above. Having a connection with the landscape is a common thread among all of the interviewees when asked about why they chose to engage in conservation matters, but many voiced their opinion about good vs. bad uses, often conflicting with the desired uses of fellow stakeholders. Both Interviewee #4 and #11 sing the praises of recreation as a part of the Vermont landscape experience, but Interviewee #8 talks about the downsides of allowing certain uses on the land.

Interviewee #8: “The kind of person that wants to be involved in farming usually doesn't like dealing with the public a whole lot. So you end up with a property like ours where you have a small farming component that's always at odds with the resort component. You know we want to graze cows in this pasture but we want to run mountain bikes through on the trail and so forth and so on. And the kind of employee that wants to work on a farm doesn't want to be hassled with a bunch of questions from the tourists. I see that as being an issue that extends into recreation on these lands as well... If he's got a flock of sheep out and their pasture lambing, he doesn't want anybody within 200 yards of them.”

This exemplifies the idea everyone wants something different from a landscape and reconciling that can be tricky. Sometimes stakeholders are motivated to conserve because they want to help the surrounding community, sometimes stakeholders are motivated to conserve because they need a tax break. These decisions, whatever they may be, shape the landscape for everyone and how

everyone is able to use conserved land.

Interviewee #5: “My position is that that the forces that are lined up against us are winning partly because they've splintered the group of people who should be allies, the mountain bikers and the hikers and the hunters don't get along. The wildlife conservationists... I had a person tell me that they thought that the wildlife management lands in Vermont should be closed...I don't know if you are aware of this but thirty five years ago hunters and fishermen imposed a tax on themselves so all ammunition, all guns, all fishing equipment all that stuff has got an extra tax built into it That tax goes into a fund...and that fund is used for conservation purposes.

So all of the wildlife management areas in Vermont were purchased with fees that hunters and fisherman have put on themselves. For the last twenty years those same communities, hunters and fisherman have plotted to put the same tax on backpacking equipment, binoculars, and bird books. That community has voted it [taxing other uses besides hunting and fishing] down every single time. But this person wants me to not have access to the land that basically I bought and I'm allowing them on. You see what I mean? It's like, wait a minute. So when did we become enemies of each other?”

Interviewee #5 brings up the very important point that every stakeholder believes that he/she knows what is best for the land and what uses are better than others.

Use conflicts happen all the time and it can divide stakeholders and make collaborative planning for the future of the landscape in Vermont very difficult.

Bringing all of these stakeholders together into one discussion about the future of conservation in Vermont is difficult and the reason why *Public Outreach*, the final code in this category, can prove to be challenging for stakeholders to organize. *Public Outreach* is when community members/external stakeholders take it upon themselves to initiate conservation efforts without a pressing need, sense of urgency, and fear of impending development to motivate them. In Duxbury there has been one instance of the community joining together to conserve a valued swimming hole because community members knew that people would want access to it in the future.

Interviewee #13 describes the process through which the land was conserved.

Interviewee #13: It was just um, one of the guys that uses the swimming hole. He just kind of you know started calling up people he knew.

LL: Alright, interesting. Wow. That's takes a lot of initiative.

Interviewee #13: It does. So our first meeting everything you know everything was so informal when we first started and our first chair [of the Duxbury Land Trust], you know I think we had all of the meetings at his house... I don't even know how often we met but that's what they were. [We were] Informal and winging it.

In this quote, the interviewee alludes to this kind of outreach being less informed and organized, but there was support and so the community rallied for the swimming hole and made this initiative the first conservation project for the Duxbury Land Trust. Another Duxbury stakeholder explains, however, that this kind of support from the community is uncommon. In the following quote, the interviewee initially references the work done by the community for the swimming hole, but goes on to explain that this was a singular event for the town of Duxbury.

Interviewee #4: So they [the stakeholders of Duxbury] approached the land trust but you know in 13 years we've only...I can't even think if there are any other people that have said you know I got a piece of property I want to conserve it.”

It can be hard for a community to rally around a theory such as the benefit of conservation planning. Interviewee #13 goes on to describe the difficulties of having a land trust in a community that might not be completely invested in the land trust process of conservation.

Interviewee #13: “I mean 30% of the town is already protected under Camel's Hump State Park. So the townspeople are like nah, we don't really like much more land to be, you know conserved and we have enough that's conserved. But I think there are still opportunities for us to conserve parcels.”

The disconnect between a community's short term land use goals and its need for long term conservation planning is what defines the codes in the next thematic category of the study, “Strategy and Management.” This category focuses on what good strategic planning for conservation looks like. The four codes that are

a part of this theme are,

Land Use Limitations

Perpetuity

Stewardship

Holistic Landscape Visioning

This thematic category encompasses codes that speak to future landscape management. Each of these codes refers to a long-term management technique or variable. Management is an important part in the conservation process, and this thematic category is comprised of the crucial management process codes in the study. One of the factors that land trusts and stakeholders care a great deal about is how long a conservation effort will have an impact on the landscape. Conserving a piece of land can be a long and strenuous process, and can also be very emotional for people who care about the future of their beloved landscape. For this reason, there is a great deal of debate about whether or not to conserve a piece of property forever and there are many people who want a certain permanence to a conservation easement. They want to be assured that the natural resources they have access to will also be accessible to future generations. The permanence of an easement is also referred to as *perpetuity* and is the first code I will discuss in this thematic category.

In almost every interview I conducted, the interviewees mentioned the idea that perpetuity can be an unrealistically long period of time. Many were in favor of making sure that an easement lasts for a lengthy period of time, but almost every person I spoke with had an issue with the idea that a landscape would remain unchanged forever. The reasons for being unsure about perpetuity did vary,

however. In one interview, when asked about what the thought of the concept of perpetuity, Interviewee #6 replied,

“I think it's hard to imagine how our world will change. If you think about how things have changed between 1900 and 2000, in 100 years, and the kind of way we were using the land in 1900 as opposed to 2000. If people had made some rules in 1900, would they apply in 2000? And that's really tricky. So designing an easement that would be flexible, I mean how could you do that not knowing how the world is going to change? So that goes back to the question of sustainability and what kind of landscape is sustainable. And what kind of land do we need protect for our communities, for our agriculture for our wildlife and regardless of what else happens?”

Interviewee #6 is not convinced that perpetuity is a realistic goal for conservation but is also unsure how to structure an easement that would allow for amendments. People understand that the world changes rapidly and that it is impossible to guess what we might need from a landscape in the future. As Interviewee #7 observes,

“I think perpetuity obviously is impossible. I mean you can't have things in perpetuity because eventually something will change. The social structure will change. You wait long enough, you know the sun is going to explode so the question is when will perpetuity end...”

No interviewee directly says that perpetuity is a negative goal. Many do agree, however, that it is an unrealistic goal.

Interviewee #1: “We talk loosely in terms of forever and perpetuity and things like that and those are short cuts, as long as we can manage it under the current system... I think it's logical to think that as we shift as a nation that we may not, that that set of beliefs that were...initially worked for our country may not always work, and that some of those beliefs may change and that may be reflected in our laws and our regulations.... So as long as our legal system is in place we do believe that these easements will ... be durable. It is important to note that...the government always has the trump card, they always have the power of eminent domain, and they could undo things at the government level, through eminent domain and current use so at some level the government does have some power and this is why land trusts, one of many reasons why land trusts need to not act unilaterally ...but if you act unilaterally and in opposition to...what the community feels and the community values...eventually you are setting up a situation where it is you against the entire community and the government...I think that with land conservation, most land conservation, it is no longer "let's just get the land," you really have to tune into the community values and not brainwash people but help them feel connected to the land.”

Interviewee #1 starts by explaining that conservation needs to be flexible and able to accommodate change. They also believe that if a land trust is communicating effectively with its constituency, conservation negotiations will be more amicable and effective. After hearing a similar take on perpetuity from many different interviewees, it was interesting to talk to an internal stakeholder for the Stowe Land Trust who talks about the legal issues currently regarding conservation easements in Vermont and how they deal with the requirement of perpetuity.

Interviewee #10: “The Land Trust Alliance says you just have to be extremely careful if once you conserve that land with its permitted uses and its restrictions, you’ve really got to be prepared to live with that forever and just because development has come around, and wouldn’t it be great to have x, y or z in there, you, unless there is an overwhelming change of circumstances, it’s just not going to happen. And I think it’s appropriate to say, ‘look landowner and everybody involved, this is it, so don’t expect to be able to come back and say well we’d like to change this to allow such and such.’ The amendments policy is becoming increasingly locked down so if you want to have an amendment you have to jump through a lot of hoops....You got to think out ahead of time what you may or may not want to reserve before you sign the easement.”

What is made clear by this quote is the fact that what stakeholders feel about perpetuity and what they are bound to do by law in a conservation easement are two very different things. From the internal stakeholder’s point of view, managing land in perpetuity can be a daunting task. From an external stakeholder’s point of view, perpetuity can be perceived as detrimental to economic growth.

Interviewee #6 explains,

“You know there’s town owned land in the Mad River Valley obviously. The planning commissions and conservation commissions, well mostly the conservation commissions actually write the management plans for the land and in Warren there’s this 100 acre parcel behind the school called Eaton Forrest. It’s not conserved but it’s town owned and the conservation commission went through this whole process to create this management plan and they had focus groups and they had this really great management plan that the community was involved in creating. With all these management recommendations but it’s now a matter of following through with the management plan and making it happen. So one of the things that were included in the management plan was to conserve the land and so the

conservation commission worked to get this grant to make it a town forest and conserve it.”

“And then the select board voted it down. Even though it was in the management plan they said, nope we don't want to tie it up for perpetuity. Actually the planning commission recommended [this] to the select board but they did not approve that process because they didn't want to tie it up in perpetuity, they didn't know, they didn't want to, you know, tie future townspeople's hands with the land. It's really interesting that they decided that so obviously that whole management plan creation was really important in having the townspeople involved but even when the plan was created ... with a volunteer conservation commission implementing the plan...It's tricky.”

Even with strategy and goals in place, this project suffered because of the ominous characteristics of perpetuity. Education about the implications of conservation in perpetuity is important in making sure that stakeholders are able to make informed decisions about their landscapes without allowing the fear of both a lack of or too much development to impact the decision making process for a conservation initiative. Interviewee #7 states,

Interviewee #7: I think there is a role in land trusts and educating, making people more literate in what an easement is, what it's about and as [we obtain] more of these parcels, really the growth of land trusts is astounding in the last 30 years in the US but what's happened is those parcels are now coming up for sale in a big way, this is sort of generational turn over and so legal enforcement is a major issue. I think it's more when it comes to forced management, because you can't, you have to be dynamic, just in the nature of climate change alone, let alone national forest successional processes that we don't really understand that well. You can't manage a forest, you can't develop a management plan for perpetuity.

Being sure that you are making the right decision for you and for generations to come can be overwhelming. It can also be hard to implement management strategies that will ensure long-term oversight for a landscape. Interviewee #7 does not believe that management in perpetuity is even possible.

This long-term oversight and its feasibility is encompassed in the code *Stewardship*. Interviewee #12 talks about the risks of stewarding a piece of property over a long period of time in the following quote and brings up the issue of what

happens to a landscape when you have conflicting land use goals such as energy generation as a viable land use vs. agriculture. This is a good example of a mentality that might change in the future due to economic forces.

Interviewee #12: “We have had a couple of times where, you know, if it's an old easement and there's been a succession with the land and so the landowner didn't conserve the land or they might not be clear on what they can and can't do, so we'll arrive and there's a shed built in the wrong place, I have to say you know there's a challenge of alternative energy. You know we have had at one point a group who wanted to put solar panels up and I think they actually put the trackers up on prime agricultural soil. Um, and so it was fine. We had to explain that you know in the easement we have to keep that land in agriculture and while energy and keeping costs low is critical, let's figure out how we can put them in a different place. So that you know we can meet both needs. So there are those kinds of conflicts that happen.”

Being a steward means different things to different people. It can be someone acting on behalf of an agency or organization to maintain physical assets. It can also be someone working alone in an attempt to perpetuate an individualistic vision for a landscape. Land owners might gift their property to a land trusts and often influence easement limitations based on their beliefs about how a piece of land should be used and maintained. There are stewardship roles that vary from the smallest node to the largest. In the following quote, Interviewee #2 explains their role in the stewardship process and how it entails the oversight of a number of properties and land use methods.

Interviewee #2: “I spend at least fifty percent of my time on the stewardship work which involves for the five properties that we own its all you know maintaining trails, signage, public access with the parking area. That requires ongoing maintenance.”

This interviewee is paid to make sure that easements are being followed and any improper use of the land can be identified in a timely fashion. Another internal stakeholder from the VLT explains an even more complex stewardship program for

making sure conserved properties are following easement restrictions statewide.

Interviewee #12: “Ya so we have, we probably have like the gold standard of stewardship because, you know, many years ago we created this program with a very robust staff and we endow every project and so the goal, it's not happening now, but the goal is to have 90% of stewardship expenses covered by an endowment. So that it's not something we have to budget for every year, it's just something that comes along with a project. And so right now we have a monitoring visit and so every single year we visit every single property. And we have a staff out there and then we have internal experts that support so we've got foresters or people from the ag. group so they're providing um, help, so we'll learn things through those visits. You know and we'll provide support and help around, whether it's we're thinking of a timber cut this year but something's come up.”

In contrast to the large scale stewardship roles Interviewees #2 and #12 describe, Interviewee #13 is not paid and must volunteer time to make sure easements are adhering to the law. Interviewee #13 believes community members are not even aware of these duties of a land trust and how hard it can be to make sure properties are being conserved correctly in perpetuity.

Interviewee #13: “Some people didn't even know that I was doing it (stewardship). You know I do it once a year, keep records of the field sheet that I went out and did a walkover, checked what's supposed to be there and what isn't and have that all documented.”

As is exemplified by Interviewees #2 and #13, some stewards are volunteers who make sure landowners bound by conservation easement are following their contract regulations; sometimes entire organizations act as stewards working towards maintaining and preserving an entire state's viewshed such as the VLT. This policing task can be very difficult if the land trust's assets are insufficient to ensure proper long-term supervision of the landscape. In order for a land trust to be able to provide quality management for its constituents, partnerships with other conservation organizations or endowments like the one described by Interviewee #13 must be available to provide long-term financial backing. A few of the interviewees mention a need for proactive planning referred to in this study as

Holistic Landscape Visioning. This code encompasses the many facets of planning including conservation, economic, and community planning, in addition to early stakeholder engagement and integration into the conservation process. Interviewee #7 mentions the importance of such forward thinking for land management and why it is significant for Vermont.

Interviewee #7: You need a vision...If you see a piece of land in a broader social landscape, and ecological landscape then you know how to manage it and without that it's simply a dialogue with yourself about what do you want in this parcel? When you see it in the fabric it becomes important for these reasons. Therefore it needs to be managed in these ways. The management plan should incorporate these aspects.

In this quote, Interviewee #7 refers to the idea that instead of having conservation be a patchwork of separate easements and parcels with no common conservation goal, there is a plan that incorporates all the parcels into one vision for what Vermont should look like in the future. Interviewee #7 goes on to explain,

“I think in the best of all worlds you have a shared vision among groups that brings the best strengths of scientists together with planners and people and then you build an endowment for that vision so that when the opportunity comes up you can then...You're funding a strategic plan and that's what I see that land trusts don't do. They may think of an endowment but it's for their operating costs.”

It is alluded to here that it is not common for land trusts to think ahead in this manner and plan on a more holistic level. Community land trust often work independently of one another and while the VLT helps to fund community projects around Vermont, there is no unifying strategic plan for the Vermont Landscape.

Interviewee #5 speaks to this topic.

Interviewee #5: “So I think there needs to be built into these things somehow a strategy. Who's doing what? How does the Stowe Land Trust, which is extraordinarily well financed and unbelievable strong, work with the Duxbury Land Trust?”

Interviewee #5 suggests not only coordinating among land trusts, but also coordinating with communities that might not have land trusts but who have chosen

to conserve land in other ways.

Interviewee #5: “Maybe the Vermont Land Trust needs to say, ok if there are these other communities that are doing these things, we're going to devote a percentage of our clout to organizing them within the structure. Not telling them what to do but say, did you know that Stowe is doing this? Did you know that Morrisville is doing this? Even though they might not have a land trust but they bought a town forest or you know because we don't have the ability to do that because we don't have any professionals.”

Interviewee #5 is making the case for statewide planning instead of the piece meal model of organization that is currently used by land trusts in Vermont. What makes this holistic planning model difficult is the fact that landowners who choose to conserve are able to put restrictions on their land without consulting their community. Just as long as it is compliant with basic land trust land use regulations as a landowner you can prohibit just about any use in your easement. Down the road this becomes a hurdle for conservation planning on a community and statewide level.

Interviewee #8 speaks to the issue of *Land Use Limitations*, the final code in this thematic category.

Interviewee #8: “When the landowner has sold the land to someone else, there's more likely to be a conflict because the original landowner who put the easement on the land had good reasons for doing that and so he's ok with all of this stuff. Then he sells the farm or forest or whatever to somebody else. And suddenly this person finds that he doesn't have everything that the thought he had and so... There are going to start to be conflicts. No question.

It is not just private landowners that impose restrictions on how the land can be used in the future. Often it is partnering organizations such as the VHCB who have different missions and therefore have a different set of regulations for conservation.

Interviewee #1 explains,

Interviewee #1: The other thing to remember is that most of those community projects, if they have been funded by VHCB, and this is not an insubstantial part, the property cannot be sold to a private individual, it has to be sold to a non-profit or a municipality, so it greatly restricts what you could do with it afterwards, so it's kind of, that in and of itself is an enormous change [on the part of the landowner] You can't just sell it to a neighbor next

door. You are bound to it and the towns become, it is a big decision for them, but eventually it becomes part of their DNA.”

These restrictions can be limiting, but relationships with other organizations are necessary, for community land trusts that cannot afford to take the full brunt of the costs of conservation.

In the final thematic category of “Organizational Mechanics,” there are codes that relate to organizational processes and the economics of nonprofits and trusts in specific. The following codes refer to the work that internal stakeholders deal with on a daily basis that makes the conservation process possible. The codes for “organizational Mechanics” are:

The Finances of Conservation

Accreditation

Current Use

Conservation Procedure

Easement Limitations

Organizational Cooperation, Organizational Conflict, Organizational Stagnation

Small vs. Large Land Trusts, State Land vs. Easement for Conservation

Each of these codes is important to the interviewees in their comments about conservation in the Duxbury, Stowe, and Vermont Land Trusts. Conservation is not free. It costs money to purchase land, and it costs money to maintain it so that it stays within the documented “Easement Limitations.” For one reason or another

many community land trusts cannot fundraise effectively to ensure continued stewardship for the lifetime of an easement. In the case of the three land trusts, all have needed to rely on other conservation organizations for help with land purchases and stewardship expenses. This collaboration is reflected in the code *Organizational Cooperation*. In talking about the relationship of the Stowe Land Trust with other organizations in Vermont, one interviewee described the importance of Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the Vermont River Conservancy.

Interviewee #2: “They're our biggest funder. They are by far the most important conservation mechanism in the state. Absolutely. We also work with, we just closed on a project. I brought a copy of the newsletter for you but we just closed on a project right before the end of the year with Ecosystem Restoration Funds from DEC. They developed a land protection program to protect river corridors so that they can manage without being channeled or dredged or rip-rapped so we use funds for that program to do conservation work. We have done two river corridor easements. The Vermont River Conservancy uses the funding all the time but we've done two projects down in the lower village and let's see what else. Of course if you do Ag. projects, VHCB requires that you work with Vermont Land Trust because they have so much experience. [They are...] number one with working on farm projects but also applying for NRCS federal funds.”

In talking about the reasons for needing outside help, Interviewee #2 references the need to diversify funds so that if certain funding is restricted, other sources remain accessible. There needs to be a funding source for operations, a stewardship endowment, events, etc. and generally no one organization or funder wants to take on all of financial needs of a land trust.

Interviewee #2: I guess it's a pretty complicated process. So we do a lot of partnerships to kind of leverage our community relationships. I think a lot of organizations see us as being kind of the local representation. So if Vermont Land Trust has the expertise or a landowner contacts them, they try to work with us whenever possible to try and make sure that there's a local representation there, which is cool. Yeah, I think those are probably the two biggest funding mechanisms, like state or federal funding mechanisms that we use, we apply for a lot of foundation support when we have projects. We don't get a lot of money from those sources for operating. We do get money from the town, we get about \$6,000 in their community services budget each year and of course they always support projects that they feel they should be a partner in, and with that they typically either become the owner of the property or they co-hold the easement with us, which explains the \$6,000 too because we're taking on the stewardship responsibilities even though they're co-holding the easement with

us.”

In this quote, Interviewee #2 references many subjects that are described by codes in this thematic category. *The Finances of Conservation*, *Conservation Procedure* and *Organizational Cooperation* all play key roles in this dialogue. Money can be hard to come by in the nonprofit world and the process described by Interviewee #2 is a way for community land trusts try to achieve their conservation goals. This interviewee makes it clear that the relationship between the Stowe Land Trust, the Vermont Land Trust, the VHCB, and any other nonprofit such as the Vermont River Conservancy was helpful in achieving the ultimate goal of conserving threatened land. They continue to describe how the VHCB and the SLT, working together, has allowed for a great deal of evolution in conservation goals because the land trust needs to accept differing goals for the outcome of a particular project based on who they choose to partner with. In the case of the VHCB, the Stowe Land Trust was forced early on to consider a greater level of recreational use on conserved land at the insistence of the VHCB, and as one interviewee explains,

Interviewee #2: “I think what your question reminds me of is some of our relationship with VHCB over the last couple of years, beginning with the conservation of the Adam’s Camp property in 2006. That was such a huge public investment that VHCB really kept us on the hook for making sure that the public's investment was worth it. And it couldn't just be that there weren't going to be any houses on that property, it had to be bigger than that. So we, as part of the conservation easement, had to develop a recreation plan for the property and we had to make sure that the public had the same kind of access they did, or if not better from the point when the land was conserved. So we had to be really proactive about making sure that this was seen as a good investment of money, you know it was 1.7 million dollars at the time. It was a huge project and since then it, arguably before Cady Hill Forest, it was seen as kind of the poster child for properties that still contributed to the local economy even though it wasn't houses contributing to the local economy. It was the first time when we started toying with this idea, like wow, land conservation can still be vital to a community’s sense of place and to their vibrancy both economically and culturally. So we were starting to see that, like wow, this is kind of an interesting concept. We've always wanted it to be that way but with a private landowner, it's still working forest you know they donated this easement. Really what sort of contribution does that make? It's more of a

personal contribution than it is to the public at wide other than the fact that it's nice that it's not going to be twenty five houses.”

It is clear that the need for organizational collaboration inadvertently pushed the Stowe Land Trust towards a more inclusive conservation goal. The Adams Camps property was the first step for the SLT in acknowledging that there were alternative land uses other than agriculture and forestry. The Cady Hill project shows the further evolution of this mentality in planning for recreation even before the VHCB was brought in as a funder.

This organizational cooperation counters *Organizational Stagnation*, another code in this thematic category. *Organizational Stagnation* describes when an organization does not reevaluate its mission and goals to reflect the ever-changing needs of its constituency. Sometimes this phenomenon occurs when volunteers stay with organizations for a long period of time and sometimes it occurs when ideas stay with an organization for a long period of time, but whatever the reason it is a problem that many nonprofits, including land trusts face. Interviewee #11 describes their take on *Organizational Stagnation* and its causes.

Interviewee #11: You know as we talked earlier to it looks like it's the same group of people that are every committee in every town and you know that can lead to burn out but it just leads to a select view voices being heard all the time.

Interviewee #11 believes that with small communities in Vermont, there are simply not enough people to volunteer so civically engaged individuals keep their roles in organizations for years and “burn out.” This lack of new volunteers to take the place of those who no longer have the energy, time or passion for conservation is another example of how *The Finances of Conservation* play into “Organizational Mechanics.”

Interviewee #11 explains that socioeconomics are a major factor in who can

volunteer and become involved in conservation as a hobby. If a land trust cannot pay employees, they have to rely on a group of people that have the time, energy, and potentially money to support their activities apart from their profession. When asked about requiring participation, the response is:

Interviewee #11: "I don't think you can require it, nor do I think you should require it. Is there any way, I don't know how then do you increase the participation level? You know as we talked earlier to it looks like it's the same group of people that are every committee in every town and you know that can lead to burn out but it just leads to a select few voices being heard all the time, and how do you get more people? I do think unfortunately the groups that are involved are usually from one socioeconomic group. How do we get it so that it is a broad spectrum of voices? So I don't think that we're hearing you know from the folks on a lower social economic scale and they have valid points and valid concerns that need to be brought to the table. How do we do that? I know if you force people to do that, that would probably not happen but."

This quote from Interviewee #11 shows the balance that needs to be struck with small land trusts who cannot afford employees. This subject falls under the code, *Small vs. Large Land Trusts*. A small land trust has less potential to generate new engagement from community members because of the relative size of communities vs. statewide land trusts and also because of the cost of paying someone vs. having community members volunteer. In a comment from an interviewee from the Duxbury Land Trust when asked about their land trust's goals and activities, it was mentioned that the land trust had become "stale, it's static and it hasn't moved." This is a sentiment shared by a number of the external stakeholders from different land trusts that I interviewed. In the following quote, the interviewee describes the inability of a community land trust to be dynamic.

Interviewee:: "We can talk; we can invite people to come in. No interest. None. So we became so insular that we have become ineffectual. Because I don't think the community by and large even knows the land trust is there, 20% (of people know), so after sort of perpetually arguing this point of few, I just went to do other things. I was just like ok I've done that. I think it's important work but we're not advancing, it's not growing. It's become nepotistic. In our zeal to protect ourselves, we've completely built a wall."

Self-awareness is a trait that is not easy to maintain unless it is built into the organizational network and governance structure. Introspection can help with *Organizational Stagnation*, but the need must be acknowledged first, and there is the risk that people will become disengaged before steps are taken to evolve the values and processes within a land trust. In the following quote the interviewee questions whether or not small land trusts should continue to exist if they are failing to change with their community.

Interviewee #5: “You know I think some of the big ones (land trusts) have had some of these growing pains probably that's filtering out the smaller ones. Do you really need us anymore? Self-reflection is hard to ask yourself, geez “am I still doing what I want to do?” Is probably the hardest question anyone can ask. It's even harder as an organization because the answer is in your soul. I mean the answer is in the soul of the organization...

If a land trust is no longer needed by a community, there are other options for conservation. Many people rely on *Current Use*, a code in this category that offers a way to preserve their personal land and get a tax break in lieu of an easement.

Easements are in perpetuity and with *Current Use* laws in Vermont, there are penalties for choosing to develop restricted land but the land is not set aside forever. This gives people more flexibility with their desired use for the land. In the following quote, this interviewee chose to go down the path of *Current Use* first, but then decided to restrict the land further under an easement with the Vermont Land Trust.

Interviewee #3: “Now we have a foot in the door and our land is conserved and it is taxed at a lesser rate. But we were in land use. This farm has been in land use for I don't know, a lot longer than we've owned it. The people who bought it in the sixties from the farmers and restored the farmhouse and they put it in land use so I'm going to say this place has been in land use for at least forty years. So when we transferred it into when we restricted it we transferred it to VLT conservation, we didn't really take that much money out of the pockets of Wells.”

In this way, Current Use can take the place of conservation easements in Vermont for certain landowners. One of the other reasons people may choose not to engage a land trust is because there is already a great deal of state land nearby that is set aside for public use. Interviewee #6 states, “In places in like Warren we already have a lot of federal and state land, and people say, isn't that enough, you know why do we need more?” This quote highlights the code, *State Land vs. Easement for Conservation*.

Interviewee # 6 goes on to talk about the general public’s understanding of what the difference is between state land under easement held by a land trust.

Interviewee #6: “I don't know if the general public necessarily makes the differentiation between public land that was conserved or land that was open to the public that was conserved by the Stowe Land Trust or state land.”

Understanding the relationship between state land and land trust conservation land can be difficult for stakeholders, and this knowledge barrier combined with the logistics that go into an easement can be a barrier for fundraising and stakeholder involvement. *Easement Limitations*, the code that refers to the restrictions on a piece of land imposed by a land trust in an easement document, can affect communities and their stakeholders in different ways. Interviewee #2, an internal stakeholder, explains how the process of conservation can be convoluted and difficult.

Interviewee #2: “We've been talking to that landowner for a while and she wasn't really ready yet, she was waiting you know for the right moment. She finally decided the right moment was right after Cady Hill was finished and we're like well that's fine. This is going to be you know a totally low-key straightforward project and it ended up being a lot more time consuming. There were a lot of banks involved, there were a lot of discrepancies with the surveys, so there are a lot of outside influences that can make it [difficult], we had the money, we didn't have to do any fundraising, it all seemed like it was going to be really straightforward...we ended up having to postpone the closing even, because we didn't have all the documentation that we needed in order to close. The easement template was terrible. We had to do a ton of work to get that easement up to snuff. We had all of these grant deliverable requirements that we had to meet and we didn't have these documents created like a long term monitoring plan. We are obligated to monitor on an annual basis. We don't have a plan that says it, it's just that's what we do. So we had to write a monitoring plan.

There were just so many things, we were like this was supposed to be very straightforward and not like a lot of time and we thought and we'll just bang this one out before the end of the year and it, and all of three of this were like "what happened to the simple project, this is getting super complicated?"

When the conservation process gets complicated, community land trusts can be pushed to the limits of their volunteer and employee expertise. One stakeholder for the VLT explains the process at the statewide organization.

Interviewee #12: "Yeah, I think the reason I love conservation is its pretty complex, and it keeps it so interesting on a day to day basis. I love it, but I think I feel really lucky because so many people at VLT have a lot of experience. So, they maybe haven't seen everything but they have probably seen a lot of things and we have seventeen hundred easements that we hold so if I say 'oh have you seen this before?' I can go into a folder and I can read up on the history and VLT has incredible systems and records so, yeah, I think it is really important."

In a community land trust that relies on volunteer work and limited resources, it can be hard to navigate the nuanced *Easement Limitations* that are found with each conservation project. Time spent figuring these issues out could also be spent with other time consuming operations and there is a give and take with small land trusts in deciding between taking on multiple projects or working on other methods to gain public support. Interviewee #6 explains further about how a community land trust tries to utilize their limited resources to best support the local stakeholders.

Interviewee #2: "We get a lot of requests for you know "come out and take a look at my land" and they (the properties) just are not right. They don't make sense. They are not as high a priority as some of the others and we run them through criteria but part of that criteria is you know, is it in our plan? Is this something that we have identified as important before being approached by the landowner?"

In order to ensure a high quality of conservation work, a land trust must be discerning in the conservation projects undertaken, but there are other methods to convince stakeholders to participate in the conservation process with a particular land trust as landowners or funders. One of these methods is the last code in this thematic category, *Accreditation*.

Accreditation is the seal of quality for land trusts in the United States and assures that easements will be written and upheld lawfully. There are both benefits and pitfalls for the accreditation process, however, and as a few stakeholders explain, a process that is intended to generate support and confidence in a community for the process of conservation can often be burdensome and/or impossible for certain smaller land trusts.

Interviewee #11: “It doesn’t work for a community the size of Duxbury. It's too much of for one thing, of a financial commitment to go forward.”

Interviewee #11 is referencing the cost of accreditation which is often more than a community land trusts has in its annual budget. Interviewee #2 describes the accreditation process for a community land trust in Vermont.

Interviewee #2: “It took months and months and months to put together (the documentation for accreditation). Then we were put through what we considered a guilty until proven innocent interview over the phone. It was not a very warm and fuzzy kind of experience. You hear that from other land trusts, but at the same time you hear the opposite from other land trusts and you wonder how many of them are just keeping their experience close to their chest because you have to go through accreditation renewal every five years. We really were very outspoken about how negative the process was. How overwhelming it was and really burdensome. It costs a lot of money, number one, to apply for accreditation and then to meet the standards, you know you have to have certain infrastructure in your office, we had do financial reviews that cost \$6,000 a year. We'd never done that before. We're a \$200,000 organization; we're spending \$6,000 to do a financial review that's not even an audit.”

The accreditation process described here is long, painful, and expensive, three features that can put fundraising and new projects on the back burner. If the goal is to gain support from a community, accreditation is a choice with many implications. It is an easy way to make sure that laws are being followed and no one is questioning the integrity of the land trust, but it requires resources that are not always available in the nonprofit world.

Like the other themes in this study, “Organizational Mechanics” is a

snapshot of a larger picture being told by the interviewees. When each theme and its codes are analyzed under one lens, the story of conservation in these three land trusts starts to unfold. While there are a limited number of stakeholders that participated in this study, the picture they have jointly painted is informative in understanding what the motivations are for land trusts and stakeholders alike in creating future landscapes in Vermont.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Ramifications for the Vermont Landscape

This study is not a comprehensive look at all land trusts in Vermont and how they choose to interact with their stakeholder base. It is a snapshot into three specific land trusts and the landscapes that they have worked to create. While it is not possible to generalize about patterns of land use and stakeholder engagement motivations based on the data collected, the stories that each interviewee has conveyed paint a limited but informative picture of the communities of Duxbury, Stowe, and the Vermont Land Trust, and their relationship with conservation. The goal of this study was not to present statistical data on land trusts in Vermont, but to hear the opinions of a select group of stakeholders on specific functions and the effectiveness of their respective land trusts.

When looking at the data in terms of the interactions between internal and external systems within a land trust, there was a convergence of issues around the idea of participation. In examining the internal categories of Organizational Development, Strategic Planning and Nonprofit Governance, it was clear through the review of literature that in theory, including stakeholders in the planning process makes for a more effective nonprofit, and in this case, a land trust. The academic sources spoke of collaboration among internal and external stakeholders that would generate more realistic goals for a landscape, thus making strategic planning possible and effective. When I began looking into the idea of collaboration, I was interested

in learning more about how a land trust chooses to incorporate the needs of its constituency into the planning for a conservation initiative. In examining my themes and codes, it became clear that the primary limitation for planning was not collaboration. In fact it is a stakeholder's desire to participate that limits planning. In much of the theory of internal systems that was presented in the literature review, there is an assumed level of stakeholder engagement that fuels the process of dialogue between and among internal and external stakeholders. The models assume that stakeholder will want to be involved if given the opportunity, but in reality this is not always the case.

In both *Democracy in Practice* by Bielele and Cayford and *Strong Democracy* by Benjamin Barber, techniques and theories are discussed for how a governing body can better integrate its constituents into the decision making process. It is important that a representative organization create avenues for effective participation so that the public's ideas are heard and best served. Susan Clark and Woden Teachout talk about the reluctance of the public to be civically responsible and participatory in *Slow Democracy*. Clark and Teachout explain:

“[A]dvocacy takes an extraordinary amount of energy, and it is not sustainable for most people, most of the time. Some of us might have energy for advocacy some of the time, but most people don't—which is why so many Americans are turned off by the way we currently practice democracy” (Clark and Teachout, *Slow Democracy* 2012, 57).

Robert Putnam delves deeper into the origins of the decline in participation in his book *Bowling Alone*, and explains many of the reasons for the decrease in public participation and civic engagement in the United States over the last century. He concludes that there has been a drop not only in an American's likelihood of

participating in more political activities but also in social interactions. He illustrates this by highlighting shifts in behavior such as watching sports instead of playing sports, bowling alone instead of bowling in leagues, and not having a formal dinner time with family or friends. In short, Americans are becoming shut-ins (Putnam, 2000). This increasing disconnectedness might sound unrelated to political theory, but as Benjamin Barber explains in “Strong Democracy,” this egocentric behavior took root many years before these American social trends began.

Democracy is a complex system, but Barber breaks this broad theory down into three simple frames of thought. He lists anarchy, realism, and minimalism as the three defining ways of seeing the world within the confines of the current liberal democracy that we have today in the United States. Anarchy, he sees as the natural self-interest of human beings. Realism refers to the system of laws that is needed to keep people from doing whatever they desire, and minimalism describes the mediocre political state that is the product of Anarchy and Realism working together. Citizens who practice minimalism strive to strike a balance between the heavy handed power of Realists and the hedonism of Anarchists by promoting “politics of toleration, in which every interaction is hedged with temperance, every abdication of personal liberty is circumscribed by reservations, every grant of authority is hemmed in with guaranteed rights, and every surrender of privacy is safeguarded with limits” (Barber, *Strong Democracy* 2003, 15-16). Barber argues that our democracy did not become this way overnight. In the case of stakeholder engagement with land trusts in Vermont, the historic reasons for declining civic engagement, while shedding some light on the issue, do not solve the problem of the lack of participation among

stakeholders of the three land trusts in this study. While Vermont may be viewed as a state that has a strong culture of citizen engagement, there have been recent studies done by the Vermont Housing and Conservation board and by UVM professor Frank Bryan that indicate a decline in participation for Vermonters. In a 2008 study done by the Center for Social Science Research at Saint Michael's College and published by the VHCB, it is explained,

“For over 200 years, the tradition of town meetings has been considered a cornerstone of small - town governance in Vermont. While the concept of the local community coming together to decide local issues presents an attractive model of participatory democracy at its best, data indicates that it only functions that way for a minority of Vermonters... According to UVM Political Scientist Frank Bryan, the two most significant explanations for the decline in town meeting attendance are the advent of the Australian or secret ballot, and increasing town size” (Kessel and Bolduc, 2008).

In Bryan's book, *Real Democracy*, he documents trends in civic engagement for the state of Vermont based on attendance of town meetings that can be seen in the figures in Appendix D. It is this problem of declining civic engagement that Clark and Teachout try to solve.

Clark and Teachout explain that it is a resurgence in local, slow deliberation that provides an answer and an avenue for participation.

“Relying on far off elected officials to make decisions for us is an integral part of the American system. Indeed, our representative government was designed that way. But when official accountability is too far out of reach, and deftly obscured by professional spin, it is easy for citizens to lose interest in the political process. Indeed, citizens' democratic skills can slowly atrophy. We get out of the habit of coming together to make difficult decisions, and in the infrequent circumstances when we have to exercise our public judgment, we often do so poorly. (Clark and Teachout, 2012).”

While this is a commentary on American Democracy at large, it has many implications for land trusts in Vermont. This “atrophy” in interest means that people

do not pay attention to issues at hand until they become too grave to ignore, thus feeding back into the cycle of urgency. People are fine with the status quo because they assume that there is someone out there taking care of the issues for them. This lack of engagement can also lead to a more managerialist style of government within land trusts. When talking about Stakeholder Engagement in Chapter 4, Interviewee #2 mentions that a community land trust is often limited in the number of conservation initiatives it can take on due to the small size of the organization. Many interviewees in Chapter 4 mention the amount of work and time that each initiative requires. It is easy for nonprofits to start integrating stakeholders less because of the challenges that time constraints and uninterested stakeholders present. Beierle and Cayford raise a concern in Chapter 2 for nonprofits limiting the amount of stakeholder involvement due to the risk of integrating uninformed stakeholders into the planning process for a nonprofit initiative. The quality of decision-making has the potential to decrease if this occurs. A counter argument is made in Chapter 2, however, when Ansell and Gash talk about collaborative governance and how using this technique instead of managerialism can create efficiencies in an organization in the long term even if it requires more work in the short term to integrate stakeholders into the planning process. Ultimately, stakeholder engagement is not an issue that can be ignored simply because it takes a lot of time and energy on the parts of both stakeholders and a nonprofits. If civic engagement is declining as Clark and Teachout believe, the quality of the conservation process will be affected. When communities do not actively engage, they make it all the more difficult for nonprofits to understand the needs of their constituency.

In this way, the Duxbury, Stowe, and Vermont Land Trusts are limited by stakeholders and their shortsightedness. In thinking about the origins of shortsightedness with regards to conservation planning, there are a few issues to take into account. In her book, *Policy Paradox* by Deborah Stone, the issue of community good vs. private stake is discussed. As Stone explains:

“Because people often pursue a conception of public interest that differs from their conception of self-interest, the polis [community] is characterized by a special problem: how to combine self-interest and public interest, or, to put it another way, how to have both private benefits and collective benefits” (Stone, 2012).

This conflict of interest is at the heart of the conservation world in Vermont. Communities understand the need for preserving their working and natural landscapes, however, there is not a lot of motivation to make a decision that might limit personal opportunities on a landscape. The reference to self-interest based conservation is a theme throughout the interviews ranging from discussion about conservation’s affect on rural economies by Interviewees #6, #3, and #1, to other broader references about maintaining a viewshed and recreational opportunities by Interviewees #3, #11, #7 and #10. Self interest is a part of the negative feedback loop that perpetuates a lack of planning, and in this way external systems limit how internal systems function. Thus the Duxbury, Stowe and Vermont land trusts have governance frameworks that are based on a management by crisis paradigm that is dictated by their communities.

In order to build systems both internally and externally which move away from a management by crisis paradigm, *Social Capital*, *Stewardship* and *Participation* amongst external stakeholders needs to be fostered as explained in Chapter 2.

Building on these three values in stakeholders requires a greater foundation of knowledge about conservation and its impact on the landscape in Vermont communities. This knowledge ranges from land use options and impacts to conservation law and how it is implemented on a landscape. Multiple interviewees in Chapter 4 express the frustration at the lack of knowledge of the conservation process in smaller communities and how that directly affects when and why people choose to conserve land. For the code *Conservation Knowledge*, the study subjects refer to the barrier in learning about the inner workings of a conservation nonprofit. Without this knowledge, small community land trusts struggle to make the argument for conservation because they cannot effectively explain how the process will work and to what degree conservation will benefit or detract from a community in the future. Interviewee #5 explains that the fundamental issue with bolstering *conservation knowledge* is that knowledge costs money and takes time to obtain. When you are functioning with a knowledge deficit, your organization is not working at 100% effectiveness. In some cases there are a few knowledgeable individuals, but when only a handful of people are relied upon for all of the information in a conservation context, there is a greater chance that these individuals will burn out. This is where internal and external systems should work together to create a more efficient governance network. Internally, governance cannot work without external help and knowledge from the community. This negative feedback loop of Management by Crisis will continue to dominate if communities are not educated about how easements function, what implications they hold for the future, and what needs to be done with planning and stewardship. Land trusts need to maintain dynamic

organizational systems so that they can plan strategically and change internal processes when needed, and the only way to ensure that this happens is through an education process for stakeholders and land trust agents that focuses on illuminating both the natural and social connections within a community.

In addition to the barrier of knowledge, there are other barriers that perpetuate negative feedback loops within the conservation system in the Duxbury, Stowe and Vermont Land Trusts. Nash explained “fortress conservation” in *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967). This idea that land should be set aside *as is* has deep roots in American conservation history over the past century. The idea that wilderness is a place apart from civilization has influenced land trusts in their easement regulations, frequently dictating that a piece of conserved land will be set aside forever in a static state. Only rarely and through much effort can the management practices and goals for a piece of conserved property be changed. Trying to impose perpetuity is one manifestation of self-interest playing out in the planning process. Perpetuity as a clause in an easement means that we, as humans and community members believe that we know what is best for the environment at any given time. Perpetuity also assumes that future generations will actively try to destroy our vision of the world through bad management and harmful uses of the land.

Conservation in perpetuity remains a huge boundary for strategic planning that encourages the negative feedback loop of management by crisis. There is a point of cognitive closure when perpetuity creates a false sense of security for a community through promising the continuation of a particular landscape aesthetic

when in fact, what is good for a community now might be detrimental in a decade's time. Allowing for property to be conserved in perpetuity means that stakeholders not only make last minute decisions about conservation, they make them irrevocable. Perpetuity, as explained by interviewees #6 and #1 is a very long time to plan for. Both interviewees believe that we cannot know what we will need from our landscapes in the future, so to set parcels aside forever with the belief that we have chosen the permanent use correctly is presumptuous. Perpetuity also brings up the question of, if a piece of land is set aside permanently today with one set of goals and values, and 20, 50, or 100 years down the road we decide that land is better used for something else, how will we be able to cope with the lack of flexibility in the system? Amendments are possible, albeit very difficult to enact with a conservation easement to ensure that the initial intent of easement at inception does not change. To amend there needs to be an amendment policy in the original easement, and all amendments must be in compliance with state law and federal tax law (Byers and Ponte, 2005). Because of these rules, amendments do not necessarily change the flexibility of an easement in a way that would allow a property owner or a community to rethink the nature of an easement to better fit a changing social and environmental landscape. Amendments also do not create links between parcels that were not there before. You cannot create wildlife corridors retroactively if you have not planned to conserve two pieces of property that are abutting. This then begs the question, if strategic planning is based on a holistic vision of how all conserved parcels in Vermont fit together to create a bigger picture of environmental and social health, then what happens when you have already started the process of piecemeal

conservation where singular parcels are set aside forever with no thought for how they will fit into the future landscape of Vermont on a statewide scale? If we revisit Lindblom's theories, it is interesting to think about the pros and cons of sticking to an incremental system. If the Stowe, Duxbury, and Vermont Land Trusts continue with conservation the way they have in the past, there will be change over time and stakeholders and land trusts will slowly work out what they want and don't want for a landscape through trial and error. The problem with this model is that when it comes to ecological health and social welfare, there are some issues that need to be dealt with on a more rapid and all-encompassing basis.

The urgent need to conserve land arises from impacts of rapid change through economic development which makes incremental policy changes difficult. People start to see the landscape around them evolve in ways they do not like and are motivated to take action and prevent unwanted buildout. Urgency is a major influence on both perpetuity and strategic planning as it affects the long-term impacts of perpetuity and the model for strategic planning. When conservation planning is done on a case-by-case basis instead of on a holistic level, it is far harder to plan for the greater good of an entire community because there has been no official avenue for public involvement and no framework for making sure designated uses complement the future conservation and social efforts of a community. Strategic planning must take place before the inception of a conservation initiative in order to maximize its success. In this way, conservation in Vermont has been a negative feedback loop that is fueled by stakeholders identifying deficits in the landscape and land trusts are left scrambling to save the affected piece of land.

If a land trust is unable to create a diverse and strategic vision for conservation that looks ahead 10, 15, or even 50 years down the line, then what remains is a patchwork of random puzzle pieces that do not fit together socially or environmentally. While it may not be possible to link together all conserved land in Vermont due to availability of parcels that have been in private ownership, it is possible to be more calculated than what the current system allows for. Adaptive management is the theoretical foundation that allows for a system of organizational self-assessment and the greater possibility for the inclusion of a strategic approach to land conservation in Vermont. Adaptive management is a key component of Collaborative Environmental Planning as Randolph explains in *Environmental Land Use* and involves a process of evaluation for every nonprofit initiative. It is the “learning by doing process” and is the theoretical basis for organizational self-reflection. In adaptive management, there is a cycle of planning, action, monitoring, evaluation and then a new phase of planning based on what has been learned in this cycle of events (Randolph, 2004) . In the conservation world in Vermont, adaptive management creates a level of flexibility in landscape management that allows for change over time and encourages the reassessment of vision and goals. These goals should be based on the current (and future) needs of the community and the natural system within which it is embedded. Implementing this process can be difficult, however. Stakeholder involvement in a land trust is based not only on purposeful inclusivity, it also depends on a constituent’s desire to be included. As I have attempted to illustrate in many of the interviews the desire to participate can be weak.

Included in this approach is a greater level of stakeholder involvement. Stakeholder involvement assures that the constituency is heard and understood (though not necessarily supported in their positions). A holistic and proactive approach allows for the inclusion of multiple living systems, economic forces, and land uses in the planning process. Finally, integrated solutions provide constructive ideas for how to include a variety of land use needs and goals in a project while maintaining an adequate level of sustainability.

Establishing a clear Scientific Basis can be an important driver of conservation, but in a system where Management by Crisis is the motivator, articulating a scientific basis for conservation is an afterthought and not driving vision, making ecosystem management difficult. A holistic and proactive approach assumes a certain capacity to create cohesion between conservation initiatives, but with the current state of conservation in Vermont, this step in Adaptive Management is largely unattainable. It is difficult to create wildlife corridors and protect localized habitat if conservation is piecemeal.

Integrated Solutions are based on a plan for an interconnected conservation landscape where each parcel is a piece of a greater story of social and environmental sustainability. These integrated solutions bring together nodes of all shapes and sizes, from individuals to the largest NGOs, in order to create a community of action and policy that is collaborative and goal oriented. One can point to the cooperation between the Stowe Land Trust and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board as an example. Each organization has a separate mission and a distinct constituency, but together they can achieve goals shared by both. If they were to function

independently of one another, the task of conservation would be daunting. It is interesting that some land trusts in Vermont have begun to adopt some of the principles of Adaptive Management, working from the top down with towards integrative solutions without having moved completely through the first three steps of the methodology. Clearly it is beneficial to have a collaborative mentality, but these relationships cannot be truly effective unless stakeholder involvement, scientific basis and a holistic proactive approach are employed.

From Reactive to Proactive

In the famous work by Donella Meadows, *Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System*, she describes a set of guidelines on how to initiate positive change in a dysfunctional system. In the context of land trust conservation, this is important because the system of Management by Crisis is not sustainable, and in order to affect change, these following steps define places to intervene in order to create a positive feedback loop.

9. Constants, parameters, numbers (subsidies, taxes, standards).
 8. Regulating negative feedback loops.
 7. Driving positive feedback loops.
 6. Material flows and nodes of material intersection.
 5. Information flows.
 4. The rules of the system (incentives, punishments, constraints).
 3. The distribution of power over the rules of the system.
 2. The goals of the system.
 1. The mindset or paradigm out of which the system — its goals, power structure, rules, its culture — arises.
- (Donella Meadows, 1999)

When thinking about where these leverage points would exist in the land trust conservation system there are certain areas that could affect the most change in

turning a negative feedback loop of Management by Crisis into a positive feedback loop of strategic planning and stakeholder involvement. This is the proactive counterpart to Lindblom's strategy of incremental change. Meadows looks to a paradigm shift to affect long-lasting change. With Lindblom, there is no guarantee that the right kind of change will ever occur, whereas with Meadow, she is setting up a formula that allows stakeholders to actively participate in choosing their future. I propose that the following points of social change will help create a new positive feedback loop of management for the Duxbury, Stowe and Vermont Land Trusts. These points of social change were discussed in a University of Vermont class, Sustainability Education, taught by Professor Thomas Hudspeth, and have been expounded upon to reflect the context of conservation.

To best illustrate how these points of social change can affect conservation, I have used the conceptual map strategy to build a visual network made up of the following leverage points as seen in Figure 9.1

Points of social change:

There are a few points of social change that that help move conservation in Vermont away from a management by crisis cycle towards a more proactive planning cycle. Interviewees were not asked to give opinions on how to solve the problems with conservation in Vermont, but they were asked to discuss various issues that affected the process. The following factors are components of a holistic solution to the management by crisis feedback loop within the Duxbury, Stowe, and Vermont Land Trusts that could incite change based on the deficits identified by the interviewees in Chapter 4. The first factor is *Capacity Building for Civil Society* and is

defined as the process of understanding the barriers to public participation in policy development and consciously developing ad hoc networks and support structures that would not normally arise within the scope of governmental and non-governmental organizations. These networks can then provide access to creative and innovative solutions on behalf of individuals, communities, and cultures who would not otherwise be able to effectively advocate and problem solve for themselves (Kaplan, 1994). In order to understand how to achieve these creative and innovative solutions, the second point of social change must be undertaken. This point of social change is *Sustainability Education* and is defined as education that focuses on teaching students to see the internal and external systems and networks embedded in all environments, both social and ecological. SE is where Place Based Education, Environmental Education, and Outdoor Education come together to form a holistic view of how we function in a biospheric manner; how all matter, biotic and abiotic, is interdependent (Stone, 2009).

The idea behind creating a knowledgeable citizenry is that with this information they have gained through sustainability education, stakeholders are then able to understand the need for educated civic engagement. *Citizen Participation/public input/stakeholders in the environmental decision making process* is the point of social change that allows for an integration of all invested parties in the process of environmental and community planning. Creating an active and engaged populace will foster a quality in discourse about land management issues. These informed opinions will be used to build a vision for the future of social and natural environments that speaks to the needs of the largest cross-section of a community as possible (Mulrennan et. al.,

2012). One thing to remember with education and participation, is that if an initiative is limited in scope, then the solutions that this learning process generates will also be limited. To make sure that solutions are long lasting and effective, *Outreach Education* can be employed. This is an approach to learning where a student works beyond the confines of defined silos of education and engages with an extended network of pedagogical partners to gain a more holistic understanding of how a particular field of study functions, and how theory can be applied in a real world situation. This strategy for education is not limited to academia and can be seen in the fields of Community-Based Social Marketing, Community Based Participatory Research, Community Based Conservation, and Strategic Philanthropy, among others where public interest groups, agencies, NGOs and for-profit organizations use pre-existing networks within a community to increase the effectiveness of messaging in the public arena (Stone, 2009). Solutions that cross academic boundaries and include multiple philosophies have the potential to endure. This theory is at the heart of the idea of systems thinking.

Systems Thinking is a philosophical framework defined by the understanding that everything is connected through a network of patterns and relationships. All living and non-living things are part of networks of that must be regulated by properly functioning feedback loops. Ultimately it is important to understand whether feedback loops promote sustainable behavior or whether they promote the growth of disruptive behavior. When looking at the negative feedback loop of management by crisis, it is clear that it is not a sustainable system. In systems thinking, it is important to find a sustainable feedback loop where there are balances

within the system to make sure that no one point is over or under used. For systems thinking there is a web of actions that converge to work together equally, this can be used to figure out better, more effective solutions to our problems. (Capra, 2005; Meadows, 1999). Finding these solutions often means taking a second look at how we use our current technology for solving problems and how we might be able to come up with creative new ways to re-apply technology already in use. *Technology Transfer and the Diffusion of Innovation* are points of social change and terms used to describe how new applications for existing technology occur when there is a repurposing of ideas, procedures, and inventions between one organizational unit and another over time. This recycling of ideas and tools means that there is a smaller likelihood of organizations reinventing the wheel. This in turn allows for more energy to be spent working on issues that require more bandwidth. With land trusts, this means looking to other organizations and public interest areas for help with organizational development and public participation techniques. (Orr, 1992).

These points of social change are important in redefining the strategy for conservation and understand what role stakeholder engagement has in this process. Each point listed above is directly related to developing better strategies for involving the public in the conservation process, whether that is through education, the better utilization of resources, or creating more efficient and lasting relationships.

In the following figures I show how these points of social change can come together in positive feedback loops to achieve a more holistic, strategically minded approach to stakeholder involvement in conservation in Vermont. Some positive feedback loops create the wrong type of growth, but the one shown below illustrates

the growth of ideas and understanding. This is an example of a positive feedback loop that is constructive, not destructive and is one replacement for the negative feedback loop in figure 6.

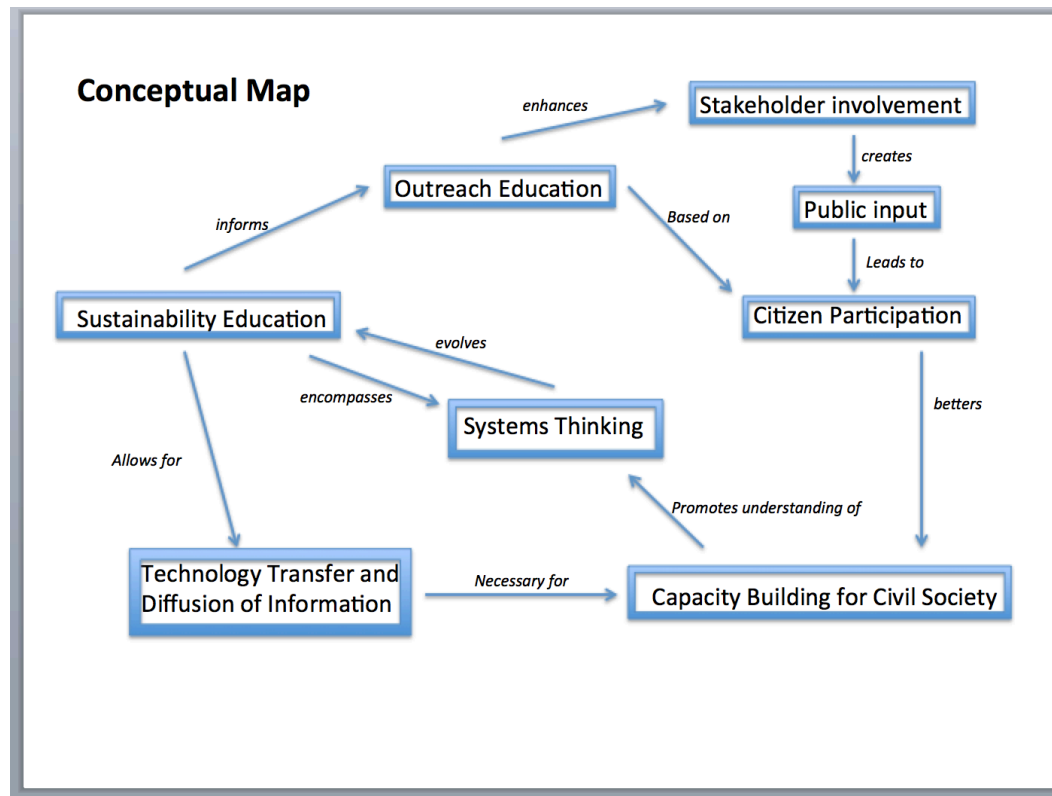


Figure 10: Base Conceptual Map

When looking for insights into building and creating synthesis in systems, it is interesting to see that in the conceptual map above, there are two positive feedback loops that have made themselves apparent through this process of disseminating the relationships between each concept. These feedback loops are shown in red for the following Conceptual Maps. By identifying these positive feedback loops it becomes clear that there is a flow of resources and knowledge between the concepts that are linked by the red arrows. The efficiency of this flow from one concept affects the

success of each subsequent concept in the network. The idea of knowledge, or in this case of these conceptual maps, education, is at the root of building a working system that is able to evolve through the learning process. Education begets, participation, which begets a better use of resources and more effective planning in the conservation process. This is shown in both positive feedback loops from Figures 9.2 and 9.3.

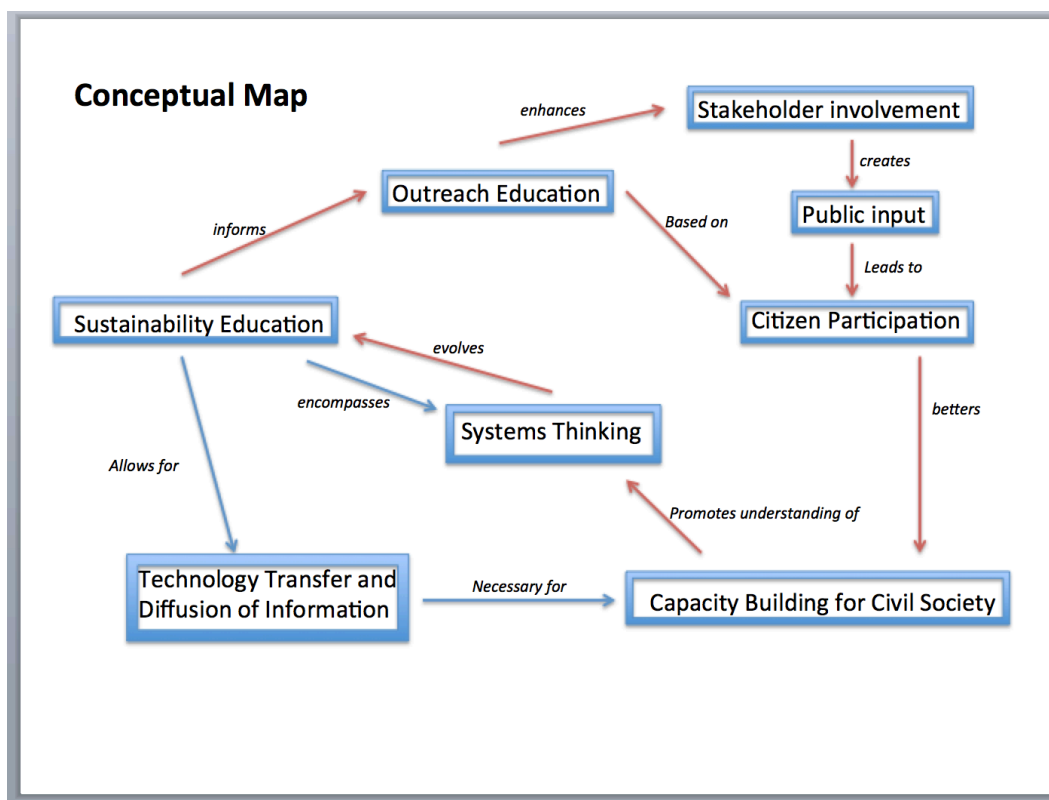


Figure 11: Positive Feedback Loop #1

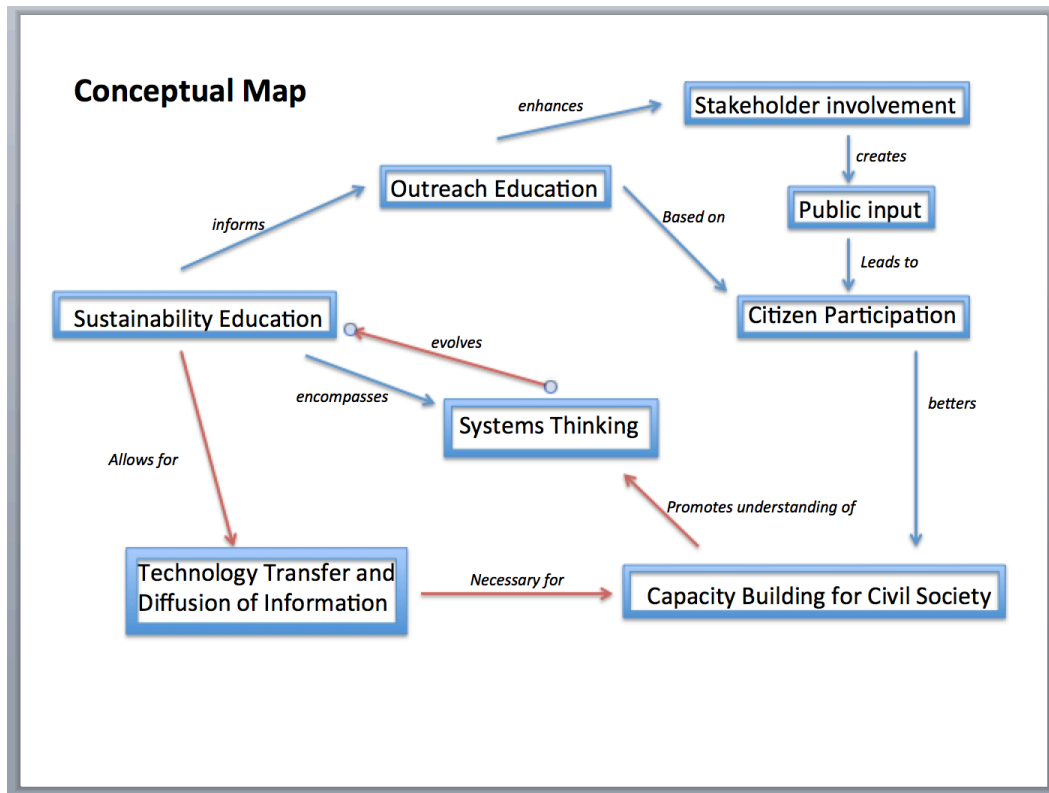


Figure 12: Positive Feedback Loop #2

Organizational development, as mentioned earlier, is defined as “an organizational process for understanding and improving any and all substantive processes an organization may develop for performing any task and pursuing any objectives” (French and Bell, 1999). In this quote the ideas of education and the optimization of resources are referred to here as “understanding” and “improving any and all substantive processes.” If the concept map I have created is applied to a land trust scenario it can be seen as a vehicle for “Capacity Building of Civil Society.” Land trusts must strive to communicate effectively with stakeholders and create avenues where the public can participate in the conservation process. They must work together to educate stakeholders about the importance of conservation and the many forms it can take.

Through “outreach education” a land trust would look to its greater network to help inform the drafting of a conservation easement and from there a sustainable management plan. This network could be made up of knowledgeable individuals, public interest groups, specialized organizations such as the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, local conservation commissions, and any other external resources that a land trust could reach out to for guidance in building specialized and contextually appropriate plans. Each community in Vermont is unique, and each parcel of land conserved has its own defining ecosystems and land use capacities. Techniques for outreach education and the diffusion of information must include these distinctive local characteristics in order to be valuable.

If a land trust is truly committed to providing a resource to a community that will be lastingly meaningful, it should provide an avenue for dialog and constructive criticism that will lead to a heightened level of deliberation among stakeholders. Community members must ask informed questions about what it means to have a “working landscape” and how they think that definition might change over time. This is necessary because without this dialogue, stakeholders remain uninformed and uninterested in participating in the process of developing their landscape because they do not see the implications of today’s actions on tomorrow’s viewshed. The daily grind of conservation can be boring, but necessary for its success in the future. To generate passion, the motivation of Urgency combined with the idea that planning ahead creates a more accessible landscape for a greater number of people needs to be presented. Land Trusts need to start educating their stakeholders about the importance of participating in all of the parts of the conservation process, not

just the fun ones. It is the same concept behind getting citizens to vote. The act of voting might not be thrilling, but the chance to change the world is.

Enthusiasm for conservation needs to start with the stakeholders. To generate constituency involvement, town meetings and other forums are used to bring people together. The promise of community involvement can be empty however, if people don't show up due to a lack of interest, or if the public planning process is perceived to be rigged so that it will inevitably move to a predetermined outcome. (Clark and Teachout, 2012). If a land trust's goal is to pay lip service to participation, true engagement will never be achieved. Clark and Teachout discuss another pitfall in the land trust model of conservation in the following quote.

“In the past, environmental successes have been achieved primarily through transactional power: purchasing land, strengthening laws, and building environmental institutions. However, many people now see the conservation movement as an entrenched, elite power structure that does not invite diversity or new ideas (Clark and Teachout *Slow Democracy* 2012, 199).

It is interesting to think about this perspective in light of some of the struggles with conservation management around the world. Jeffery Milder does not necessarily use the word “entrenched” when he talks about the deficits of the current conservation framework in the U.S. but he does believe that the system in place currently is not as effective as it could be if it integrated a larger spectrum of stakeholder needs for a landscape. When this mentality is juxtaposed with Private Land Conservation methods (PLC), it becomes clear that there is an imbalance in the integration of stakeholder needs in conservation initiatives. This could be in part because people from different economic brackets have different financial requirements for a landscape's natural resource outputs and heavy natural resource mining does not jive

with conservation all the time. If a land trust is worried that their surrounding community as a whole is interested in development, they might not want to engage those individuals as much as those stakeholders who want to preserve the natural landscape in its current state. This, however, only creates problems down the road as Bierle and Cayford discuss. It can be better to confront conflicting stakeholder use issues from the beginning of a proposed conservation project than have issues come up over time that will have the potential to affect the social capital of a land trust through a lack of trust on the part of its constituency. In order to increase stakeholder involvement, a land trust needs to have a deliverable that appeals to its stakeholders and also makes sense ecologically.

In addition to tackling usage conflicts, the Duxbury, Stowe, and Vermont Land Trusts also need to figure out how to make conservation worth people's free time, as it is mostly volunteer driven at this point. Time commitment is a limitation for stakeholder involvement with a land trust as illustrated in Chapter 3, but is counteracted by education on conservation matters. As Clark and Teachout state in *Slow Democracy*, "In order to be heard, you have to research and organize and educate and network and convince (Clark and Teachout, 2012)." The heart of the issue of management by crisis is in this quote from *Slow Democracy*. People have fought for our ability to participate in a democratic process, and to think that opportunities will appear out of nowhere is the stuff of fantasy. Education is the tool for instigating change and is the fuel for a positive conservation feedback loop. Communities must learn to be proactive, not reactive, and they do this by understanding the natural and social issues at hand that influence the landscape around them.

Conclusion

We live in a conservation climate of fear. We fear that we will lose the landscape of our past, we fear that we will make the wrong choices in the future, and we fear that we will let development happen while we are not looking. In many ways, we have dealt with this fear by putting our landscape on hold. We have put the stamp of perpetuity on our conservation projects and have limited the uses for our land to create an environment of safety from both an aesthetic and ecological standpoint. This is not to say that we must not be careful of what uses we allow, but we must act with an open mind and a progressive outlook. Inaction can be just as destructive as the wrong kind of action. To prevent both stagnation and ill-conceived conservation initiatives, an education process must be employed that helps stakeholders understand better what each others needs are for a landscape and the importance of having an active discussion about how to integrate all of these needs in the future. Participation is a fundamental aspect of democracy, and our non-profit governance system is predicated on this system functioning effectively.

Over the course of my thirteen interviews and throughout the coding process, I found myself converging on the conclusion that a strategic plan for conservation in Vermont is difficult to achieve with the current model for conservation. When examining the feedback loops mentioned in Chapter 4, it is clear that land trusts need to transition to a positive feedback loop for their conservation approach. With a negative feedback loop, a land trust will always be functioning within the framework of management by crisis, which prevents any opportunity for strategic

planning. To allow a positive feedback loop to exist in conservation, it is important to have a growth in education alongside the growth in planning infrastructure within the network of conservation in Vermont. Figures 9.2 and 9.3 illustrate these positive feedback loops in conservation that would generate a greater level of stakeholder engagement through sustainability and outreach education in addition to systems thinking frameworks that are instituted in organizational development.

What is clear from this study is that the method of conservation in Vermont will need to evolve to accommodate a larger number a people who want to live in a rural landscape. Connecting people and landscapes requires a great deal of planning and engagement both from internal and external stakeholders, and also requires that there are supportive relationships between conservation organizations because the task of conservation is too great for one organization to take on alone. The interviews from this study allow for a better understanding of what factors truly affect the success of a conservation initiative in Vermont. The size of a land trust plays a role in how land is conserved, but many land trusts have learned to work together to achieve conservation goals no matter their size. The weak links in the conservation process as described by many interviewees were the methods of engagement and waning civic responsibility. Using different techniques for generating a greater level of public support will aid in strategic planning for conservation. The conservation community needs to update their planning methods and frameworks to better plan for Vermont's future. There is an unparalleled natural resource in the State of Vermont and stakeholders need to be made aware of the role every Vermonter has in deciding their shared landscape.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guideline for Internal Stakeholders

Appendix B: Interview Guideline of External Stakeholders

Appendix C: Vermont Land Trust Map of Conserved Land

Appendix D: Total Conserved Land in Vermont in 2010

Appendix E: Stowe Land Trust Conserved Land 2013

Appendix F: Town Meeting attendance in Newbury VT from 1970-1998

Appendix A:

Interview Guideline for NGO employees/B.O.D. members

- *Please tell me a little about why you wanted to participate in the land conservation process*

Prompt:

- Was it because of your own community?
- Was it because you are interested in the future of the working landscape in Vermont?

- *Please tell me a little about the land trust you work for and its goals for land conservation*

Prompt:

-Do your conservation efforts focus on forestland? Farm Land? Recreational land? Any other type of landscape I might be missing in this list?

- *When and how does your organization decide to help conserve a piece of land for public use?*

Probe:

- Do stakeholders come to you with conservation initiatives?
- Do you go to the stakeholders and suggest a conservation effort?
- How do you “scope stakeholder issues?” and identify “opportunities, concerns, objectives, criteria, and uncertainties” of the stakeholders involved with a conservation project

- *Once your land trust decides on a piece of land to conserve, what are the next steps?*

Probe:

-What is the process of approval for allowing the conservation effort to begin?

-What committees are or could be formed? How are committee members chosen?

-How long do you have to complete the planning process?

-Is there any “analysis of [the] planning situation” that occurs? By this I mean, is the planning process directly informed by the goals of the stakeholder?

-Are there any guidelines for planning, i.e. is there a rubric for how a committee completes a management plan?

-If there are contested uses of a piece of property, how are impacts on the property gauged? How are alternatives and collaborative solutions achieved?

- *Are there any stakeholder input requirements? What falls within “Due Process” for this type of planning?*

Probe:

-Are there any outreach strategies that you use that are not part of “due process?”

-Do you have any target groups for outreach initiatives? Bikers? Hikers? Hunters?

- *How do you decide when a plan is complete? Is there an evaluation process?*
- *What does the future monitoring process look like?*

Probe:

-Does a monitoring strategy change based on a particular property?

-If management modifications need to happen, how does that process take place?

- *Is there anything I might have forgotten to ask about that you find important to the conservation process?*

Appendix B:

Interview Guideline for Non-NGO employees/B.O.D. members

- *Please tell me a little about your relationship with a piece of land that the land trust has been a player in conserving*

Prompt:

-Are you a member of the community where this land is located?

- *What do you use this conserved land for now?*

Prompt:

-Have you used this land in any other ways in the past that are no longer allowed?

-Are there ways you are now allowed to use this land that were not permitted in the past?

- *How much have you interacted with the (Stowe, Duxbury, Vermont) land trust?*

Probe:

-Did the land trust approach you for an opinion on whether or not this land was a good candidate for a conservation easement?

-Were you asked about your concerns, objectives, and goals for this property?

- *Did or do you have any official capacity in the conservation process?*

Prompt:

-Are you a member of a planning committee for a piece of land the land trust has conserved? Are you a member of any other committee that helps with the planning or maintenance process for this land?

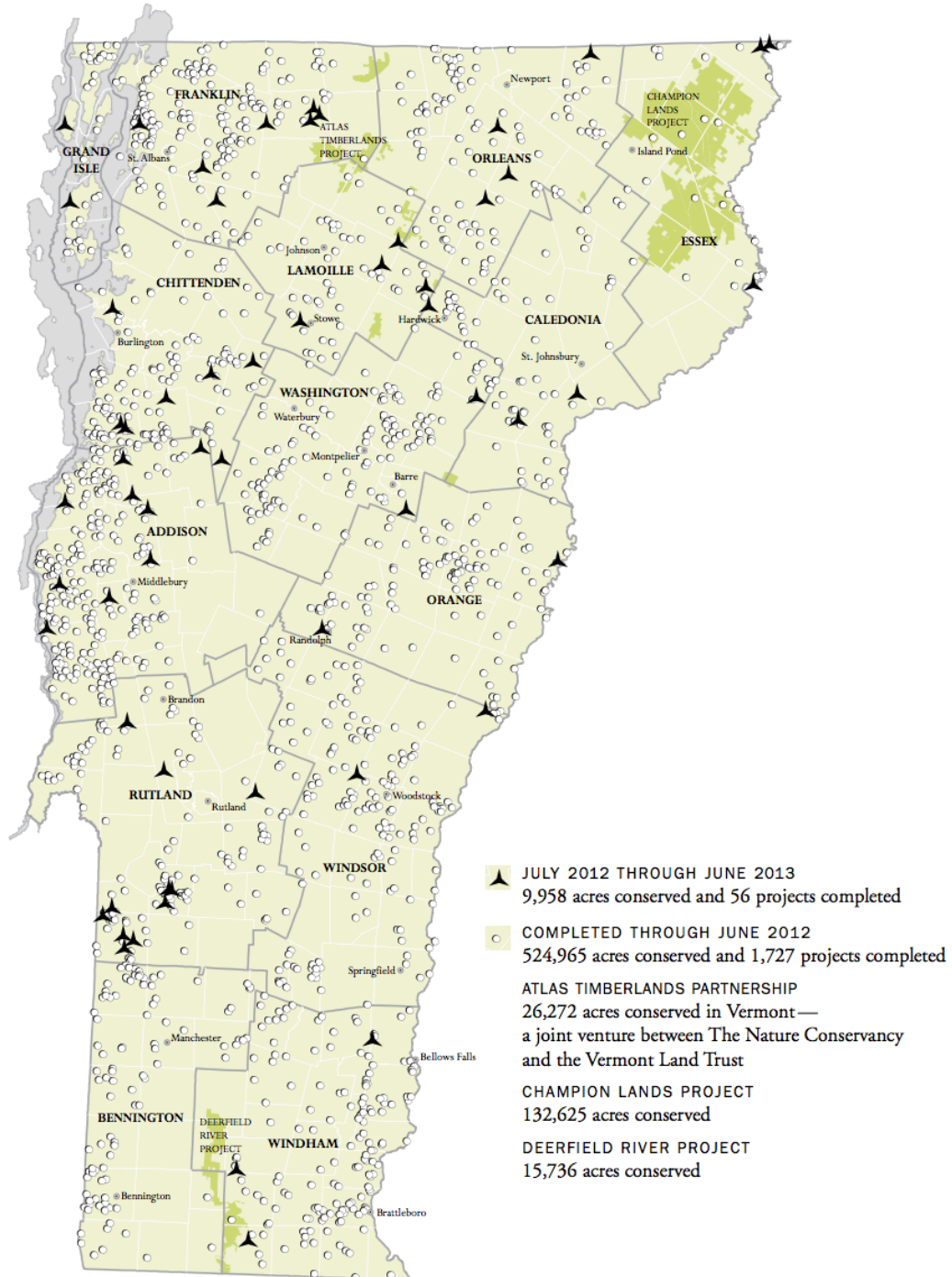
- *Did you want to be a part of the planning process?*
- *Do you participate in trail building or any other type of development processes? These processes might include forestry efforts in addition to recreational efforts. If I have forgotten a type of development process please let me know.*
- Do you participate in maintenance efforts?

- *Are or do you want to be involved in any help to monitor or implement any uses of the conserved land in question?*
- *Were you aware of the conservation initiative? If yes, how were you made aware?*
- *Is there anything else I may have forgotten to ask or any other concerns you have relating to the land trust conservation effort?*

Appendix C:

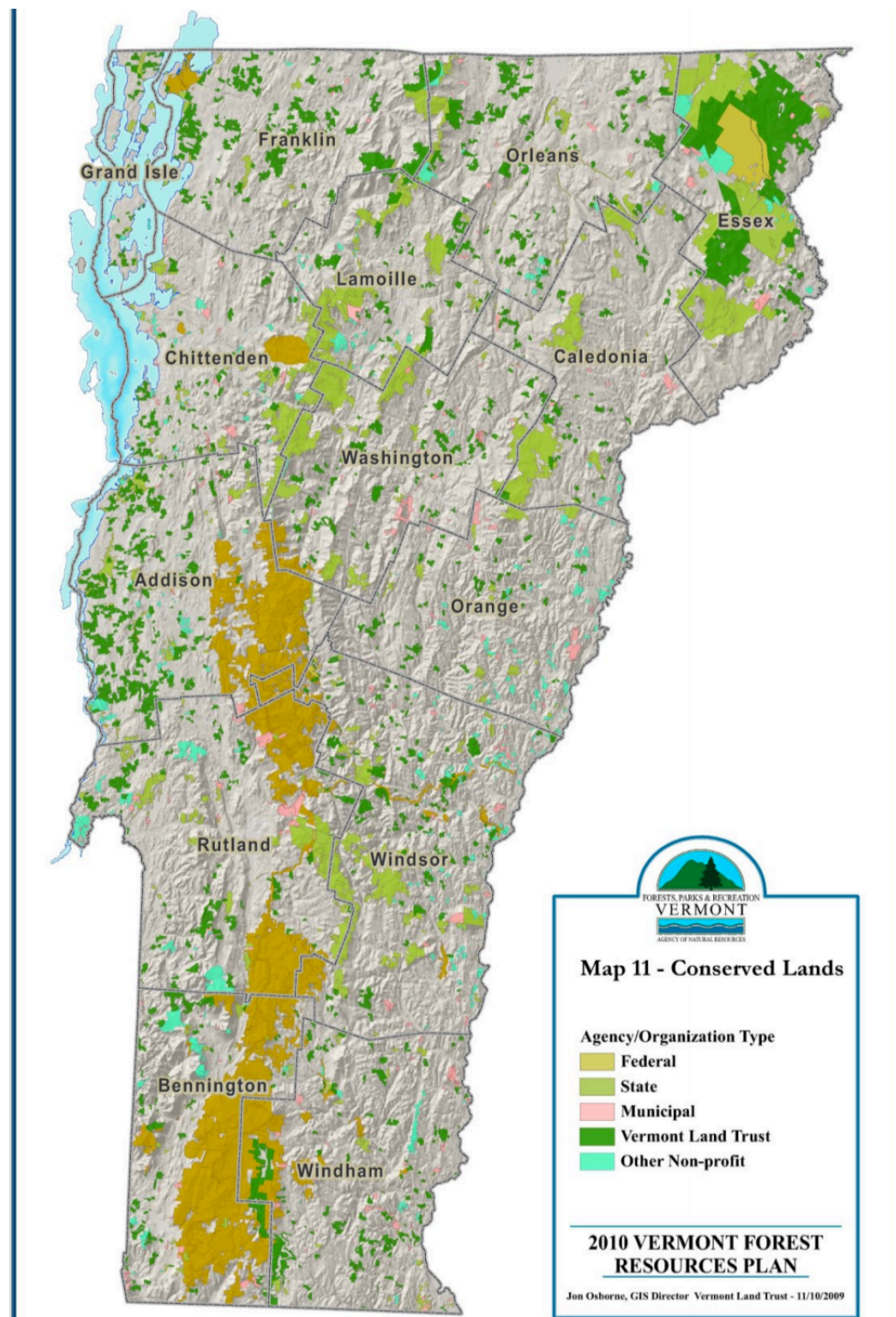
MAP OF CONSERVED LAND

534,923 acres conserved and 1,783 projects completed through June 30, 2013



(*On The Land*, 2013-2013, p. 6)

Appendix D: Total Amount of Conserved Land in Vermont in 2010-Forest Parks and Rec

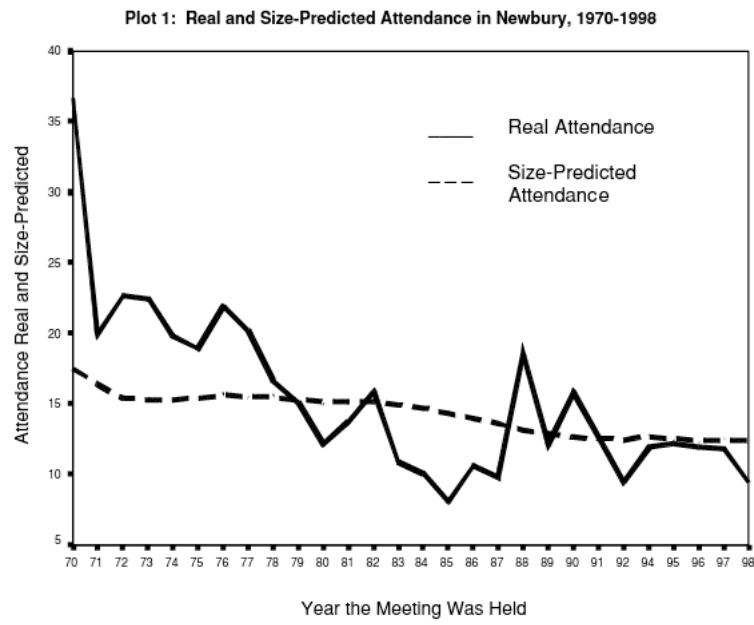


Maps. (2010). *Vermont Department of Forest, Parks, and Recreation*



(SLT.org, <http://www.stowelandtrust.org/conserved/>)

Appendix F: Town Meeting attendance in Newbury VT from 1970-1998



(Bryan, 2004, p. 85)